

Introduction to Comparative Mysticism  
- By Jacques De Marquette.

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INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE MYSTICISM—Jacques de Marquette

# INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE MYSTICISM

JACQUES DE MARQUETTE



Indira Gandhi National  
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## ABOUT THE BOOK

A concise and authoritative survey of the bearing of mysticism upon the understanding of the nature and destiny of man. Dr. de Marquette has made a real contribution to the subject by showing how the universal aspects of mysticism can be interpreted in the light of the new psychology and cosmo-physics, and what indications they give on the structure of the non-material universe.

This book, the second by the author published by us, the first being *Religion in the light of Sciences* (1964), should be particularly valuable for the serious seekers after essential truths. It goes further than comparative religion in concentrating on the vital aspect of the great religions, their mystical doctrines and their account of the human soul and of the process of its apotheosis. Its searching analysis of the teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, including Lamaism and Zen, Hebrew mysticism, the Orphics, Pythagoreans, Platonists and Neo-Platonists of Greece, Christian mystics and mystical theology, and of the beauty-loving Sufis of Islam, will help one to understand the importance of spiritual experiences and to appreciate their testimony as to the transcendent fields of human consciousness.

# Introduction to COMPARATIVE MYSTICISM

By  
JACQUES DE MARQUETTE



Indira Gandhi National  
Centre for the Arts



1965

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN  
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*To the memory of*

DR. A. K. COOMARASWAMY

in whom the spiritual visions of the EAST and  
the WEST were united, and whose untimely  
demise deprived this book of a preface.



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## *Preface*

### TO THE SECOND ENGLISH EDITION

A quarter of a century has lapsed since this essay was first submitted to the metaphysically-minded public. Its theme is still as actual as ever. In fact, a reiteration of its statements seems more needed than ever. The spectacular unravelling by scientific research of the many problems put to the thinking mind by the factual challenges of the expanding universe are constantly engrossing our mind in a thrilling enthusiasm, wonderment and admiration before the many-sided aspects of the becoming universe. This constant expansion of the chronic and spatial frames of our thinking and the accompanying multiplication of the revealed aspects of the universe, runs the risk of so diluting our sense of participation in the cosmic process that we may lose the feel of our constant implication in the underlying whole.

The present age is so absorbed by the analytical discovery of the almost infinite implications of the manifold components of facts, that it takes a tremendous effort not to lose sight of the forest of which the many species of factual trees are part and which they make up.

This general survey of mystical experiences remind modern man of the fact that the many objects of the world we cognize owe all their constituting aspects to the creative activity of our sensory organs which really give form to our interpretation of the successive quanta of the universal flux of a becoming universe; and that the fundamental element of our conscious life is not the ever-changing pageant of its aspects,

but the divine plenitude of the constant imperturbable majesty of its stream supremely ever-actual under the illusory frills interpreted as individualised entities by our story-telling senses.

A quiet and prolonged pondering over the many corroborations by the deeper mystics of the categorical superiority of *arupic* contemplation over the fanciful representations of imaged visions will be useful to many in helping them to get rid of the false glamour of so-called physical facts and to discover a new depth in the old Hindu descriptions of the three degrees of consciousness ranging from Jagrat, the fallacious imposition of coerced sensory perceptions, Swapna, the free creation of a deceptive dream universe, to Sushupti, the fullness of the divine consciousness, over and above all particularising sensory descriptions. This fundamental view of the ancient wisdom of India has been authoritatively stressed by the Buddhist teaching of Sunyata, of the fullness of the void, which my late lamented friend, the great Coomaraswamy, pointed out to be the sublime connecting link between the higher aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism, a valuable contribution to the Ecumenical trend of modern Theology.

May the new edition of this work contribute to the consolidation, in this troubled period, of the sturdy bulwark of spiritual light which India is providing for our world in dire need of the eternal truth of Bharat. May I add a word of appreciation for the kind collaboration I received from the staff of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and for the lofty vision of its inspired Founder and Head, Dr. K. M. Munshi.

PARIS :  
*January 3, 1965.*

JACQUES DE MARQUETTE



## *Foreword*

These lectures were given at the Lowell Institute of Boston in December of 1944 and repeated at the Forum of the School of Philosophy, University of Southern California, in March and April of 1945. Four of these appeared in the "Personalist" published by Professor R. T. Flewelling to whom I am glad to render here my thanks both for permission to publish these and for his unfailing cordiality and breadth of spirit in dealing with views which do not always coincide with those advocated by the Personalist school.

The following texts retain the general form of the original lectures, but many minor precisions and developments have been introduced to elucidate certain expressions and ideas which although familiar to the select audience of the Lowell Lectures are not so widely known to the more general public.

It is hoped that this may render some of the abstract doctrines of Oriental metaphysics somewhat clearer to Western readers. The fact that circumstances delayed this publication does not render it less timely. Its object is of perpetual interest since the essence of the Universe, the essence of man, and their relationship are a field which could be affected only by a fundamental upheaval of the Cosmos.

However transcendent the subject of these lectures, they may also be held to be of practical interest. All great schools of mysticism not only propose the example of their Apotheosised seers and provide a transcendent description of the universe based on their experiences, but offer practical methods of theophany and deification enabling men to trans-

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mute their psychological equipment so as to attain the apotheosis of their consciousness in beatific union.

Compatible with the latest findings of physical science in its descriptions of the essential fields of human being and becoming, this message of comparative mysticism constitutes a promise to all seekers and a challenge to the Argonauts of the spiritual realms.

JACQUES DE MARQUETTE

Laguna Beach, California.



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## LECTURE I

### *Nature and Scope of Mysticism*

**I**T MIGHT seem rather ludicrous to ask serious people to attach particular importance to the problems of mysticism at a time when nations are straining every resource for the pursuit of a terrible war. The all-embracing magnitude of the present conflict assumes the proportion of a cosmic upheaval in which not only the destinies of nations, but the very survival of our civilization is at stake. We are in the situation of the Roman Patricians witnessing the Empire submerged by barbarians or of the Byzantines, when the remnants of the glory that was Greece were obliterated by the ferocious Turks, or of the refined Chinese mandarins watching the Celestial Empire over-run by the galloping hordes of the Mongolians. Like them we are watching the passing of the civilization, which gave us the scale of values constituting the very foundation of our aesthetic and moral life.

But, there is a great difference between our case and theirs. Their worlds of values were destroyed by barbaric powers from outside. On the contrary our Western World is tottering under the onslaughts of forces of destruction it was harbouring under its most treasured developments. Our civilization is challenged by its very offspring. The present war is fought on two planes or in two directions, horizontal and vertical. While some surviving forces of the past are pitting nation against nation, new ideologies are opposing class to class across all national boundaries. They tend to substitute economic grounds to the traditional historical and cultural values in the determination of the loyalties of indi-



viduals to human groups. Men of good will are everywhere torn by the rip-tide caused by the crossing streams of ideal tendencies claiming their loyalties. Are they to be faithful to the old and cherished ideal of the absolute claim of the Country on the All in All of its children, which inspired the old "Right or wrong my Country", or are they to heed the growing sense of the universal brotherhood of man? Are they to strive to preserve at all costs the existing social order which at the same time is the heir of Christianity and helped to fashion some of its values; or should they listen to a new social Gospel claiming greater practical efficacy? Is the preservation of national sovereignty of supreme importance or, on the contrary, is the formation of a superstate more conducive to the preservation of the essential collective values of which the national state was up to now the custodian? Is not the social hierarchy and its distinct classes, essential to the preservation and progressive development of the most precious spiritual qualities which are the treasured fruits of civilization, or on the contrary, is it to be scrapped as an obstacle to the free play of the creative forces at work in the production of new superior values not only in social relationships but also in the realm of spiritual development? Is it possible to abolish class distinctions and privileges, based on the native inequality of talents and gifts among men, without running the risk of a general down-grading of values? These numerous questions, and others springing from social, economic and political trends are only a part of the perplexities harassing our contemporaries. Even in the realm of values which are deemed to be of supreme importance, those pertaining to religion, we see a general questioning of time-honoured traditions.

The most important question is that of the continued validity and efficacy of religion as a leading factor in human communities. Many of the literal acceptations of religious texts have been made untenable by scientific progress. Even some of the ethical implications of traditional religious views

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are clashing with newly acquired moral standards. People are asking themselves whether religion is an outgrown relic of a dead past or if it is still capable of a growth which will enable it to continue to play a vital part in the leadership of mankind.

This problem of a reconditioning of religion is now engaging a widespread attention. While some men of goodwill are trying to find ways and means of imparting new life to their particular confession, others are wondering whether the scrapping of obsolete differences of opinions among churches, and the establishment of some sort of world religion, is not a necessity if religion is to become part of the new world order.

The answer to this problem depends very much on the solution of another important one as to the general scope and aim of religion: Should it be directed primarily towards the other world and look upon this one as having no other value than that of a field of preparation for the next life, or on the contrary is earthly existence to be considered as being endowed with a real importance of its own, and thus worthy of claiming a part of the interest and devotion of religious men? Is the Christian ideal to be the saintly hermit or the heroic social reformer?

What is to be the attitude of religion towards the human personality? Must it be accorded supreme importance, as being the highest representative of the Divine Spiritual Nature? Is it on the contrary the main obstacle to universal spiritual realization in its insistency on an ego-centric concept of man's reality as opposed to a cosmo-centric understanding of man's essence? And is the highest aim of religion the eternal preservation of individual spiritual attributes, or the preparation of man's conscience to the abnegation of Selfhood in an effort to merge with the unity of Divine Nature? "*Mutatis Mutandis*", the same problem confronts us regarding the nature of God. Is He to be conceived as endowed with transcendent attributes constituting



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the apotheosis of our human qualities of justice, love, power and knowledge? Would not, on the contrary all attributes be really limitations, or conditions incompatible with infinity? In consequence, is God to be considered as a Person, with the characteristics of organic and delimited personality or as a non-figured, inactual, transcendent potential essence of the Universe?

Then, the very validity of this problem springs up: Can God be an object of reasoning susceptible of being handled by our methods of logic? If we no longer have implicit faith in the literal validity of the scriptures from which we used to deduct our idea of God, can we induct our conceptions of His nature from the scientific representations based on our experience, in a true Baconian manner?

This in turn leads to a question which is assuming a growing importance for all intelligent people, and which is that of the validity of our experience as a means of information regarding the nature of the universe in which we live. Already, many old philosophers, from Aenesidem down, had adopted an agnostic attitude. Descartes had paved the way to Kantian criticism of our avenues of knowledge, by basing his positing of human reality on his doubt as to the informative value of experience. Important as these views are in the history of human thought, they have been relegated to a secondary position by the recent progresses of our different physical sciences. We do no longer have to resort to philosophical meditation on the intelligibles to doubt the validity of our sensory experience. Today we no longer think nor believe that we may be misled by our senses and the account they give us of the nature of the world we live in. We actually know that we do not have the slightest idea or correct representation of the modalities of the cosmic process which occasion the emerging of the impressions we receive from the outside world, through our sensory apparatus.

This has been doubly proven. Psycho-physiology has

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shown how colours, images, sounds and other perceptions were organized and really created in our minds by the transformation of mysterious excitations of the termini of our sensory nerves into perceptible and apprehensible forms. On the other hand, physics has taught us that the reality of the tissues of all bodies was made of disconnected infinitesimal energetic systems, encasing as it were relatively immense portions of etheric vacuum in the circuit of unthinkably minute charges of dynamism. Atoms were not even worthy of their name since they were not only divisible in smaller components, but contrary to the beliefs of materialists they could be destroyed, exploded. Thus our belief in the reality of the world as we know it has been badly shaken. In fact all the trusted foundations for the establishment of our appreciations of the nature and value of the objects and persons of our daily world of experience have been swept away.

We literally do not know where we stand. We are now all like Socrates, to the extent that the only thing we know is that we know nothing definite. In his fine Lowell lectures Professor Whitehead has excellently expressed the really tragic position of the man who draws the full conclusions of our scientific discoveries. Having reminded his listeners of the fact that perceived images are created by the human mind, he added; "Nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved to ourselves; the rose for its scent, the nightingale for his song and the sun for its radiance.

The poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves, and should turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellency of the human mind. Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless, merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly," [Science and the Modern World. ( 80 ).]

This conviction, forced upon all thinking men by the recent developments of scientific investigation helped by marvellous instruments infinitely more sensitive than our origi-



nal senses, is the most important happening in the progress of civilization. It is more important in its possible repercussions than the industrial revolution of the end of the eighteenth century. It is more important than the social and international upheaval caused by the two world wars and their aftermath. It is certainly going to prove the turning point of our civilization and mark the beginning of a new era.

The most momentous aspect of the post-war reconstruction is going to be, not the repairing of the material ruins of the war, nor the creation of a new international agency for the preservation of peace, but the translation of our new view of the reality with which we are dealing in our experiments with life and of which we are integrally immediate parts, in terms of a new scale of values, based not on the fictions of our imagination, but on a greater approximation of reality.

Far from detracting from the value of religion, this new understanding rather strengthens its position. From the Ecclasiast claiming that all things were vain to the declaration of Jesus "My kingdom is not of this world", our religion has sought to bring men to attach little value to the world as we knew it. And even today, while many religious leaders have been led to attach a growing importance to social and economic factors as fields of ethical striving, there is still a vast department of religion which is entirely other-worldly. It is the realm of mystic endeavour.

Since the days of the reformation, Western Christianity has become more immersed in the problem of correlating religion with social and worldly values; according to Prof. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The typical puritan expected to build a society in which the Scripture was really and materially to be fulfilled." This world-mindedness has tended to be the dominant factor in the practical activity of the churches. And yet, far from increasing their influence in society or their hold on their worldly minded flock; the importance

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of organized religion in Western countries has been constantly on the wane. Paradoxically, religion has never exercised as small an influence in modern countries as since it has been professing to consider the shaping of worldly affairs as one of its main functions. The Danish philosopher Hoffding expressed most happily the change which came to pass in the attitude of religion, saying that if, formerly, it was as a pillar of fire in the van of nations, leading them on to God; now, it has become like an ambulance trailing in the rear of the column and picking up the stragglers and the weary.

This attitude was partly prompted by the philosophical realism of most Christian theologians, who assert that the world is not a pure creation of man's imagination, as the Idealist school holds, but enjoys at least some measure of reality. Between the idealists and the realists, mystics occupy a mediatory position. While admitting that sensory perceptions which make up the world of human experience are indeed the result of the image-producing faculty of the mind, they claim to experience the existence, under or behind the world of occasions of perceptions in which we see ourselves as moving, of another world, a world of causes, related to perceptible objects and which seems endowed with a measure of *sui-generis* reality. Yet, even this subtle realm of causes is held by most mystics to be only of a relatively greater reality than the physical universe, and to be ephemereal when seen from the standpoint of the supreme Divine Reality.

Thus, mysticism appears as a most welcome mediator to religious-minded men seeking to conciliate religion, with its indispensable ethical incentives, and a concept of the world compatible with factual science. While agreeing with the psychological arguments of idealism, it preserves the full reality of the objective universe, though perhaps not in the sense of native realism but as providing objects of ethical choices, as long as man leads a personal life.



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Also mysticism liberates theologians from the vicious circle of trying to attain knowledge of God through the use of reason as developed by our usual experiences, which is preposterous in the light of our new understanding of the arbitrarily restricted and selective nature of the origins of our perceptions of the objective universe. The mystical faculty, without passing by the intermediary of sensory activity, nor resorting to any rational induction nor deduction, gives man a first-hand experience of a reality, objective enough to escape the peril of solipsism, that belief in the exclusive reality of the subject, and yet so different from our usual world, that it remains beyond the pale of ratiocination. While some of the aspects of its experiences deal with definite objects pertaining to another world, others, of a completely transcendent nature, give man the assurance of an immediate relation to God and even of communion with His transcendent being.

In fact mysticism seems to be able to solve most of the dilemmas confronting our generation in nearly all the avenues of thought and activity. Hence the timely character of an attempt to study its modalities and to interpret whatever messages it may have in store for puzzled modern men.

Its value is double. First, the vast number of men who have experienced phases of mystical awareness revealing the existence of another sphere of life opened to men, amounts to a proof of the reality of religion's claims regarding man's future life in a different world. In the very name of experimental science, this collective testimony cannot be brushed aside, and must be reckoned with in any serious attempt to understand human nature and its possibilities.

The second important point about mysticism is that it evolved a method for developing the faculties which enabled men to rise above ordinary experience and attain a first hand contact with the transcendent realities. This is of the utmost importance since it tends to remove the mystical experience from the realm of sporadic exceptions to align it

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with the requirements of experimental science which insists on taking into account only those experiences susceptible of becoming universal.

This brings us to try to give a definition of mysticism. It is a most vexing subject, because although agreeing on some general points, the descriptions of mystical experiences differ in many respects, some quite important. Thus, while tending to prove the existence of other modes of consciousness than our usual one, mysticism is yet unable to give us a vision of both their nature and their data, sufficiently clear to arrive at a definite understanding. This has been very aptly expressed by your illustrious William James in his epoch making book on the "Variety of Religious Experience"... our normal working consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence, but supply the requisite stimulus and at a touch they are there. No account of the universe in its totality, can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded . . . they open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of accounts with reality" (p. 388.)

The ambition of these lectures is to make use of the method of comparative mysticism to try to draw the first faint outlines of the map of the subtle regions sensed by the mystics in their incursions beyond the veil of appearances.

Before going any further in our definition of mysticism as distinct from sporadic mystical experience, we shall give the very general and inclusive one that it deals with the attempt to reach, while still alive in this world, a knowledge and experience of the next world promised by the teachings of religion and generally held to be experienced after death only. In our attempt to arrive at a more comprehensive defi-



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nition, we shall begin by resorting to the method of negative theology and see in what mysticism differs from quests generally supposed to be akin to it.

We just saw that it differs from ordinary religious practice by the intense desire of the mystic not to postpone reunion with the Lord until after death, which leads him to works of superogation, above the ordinary prescriptions of religion.

Mysticism is very different from the so-called spiritualism of the evocations of the seances, in as much as while the people who resort to the ouija board or to necromancers, desire to enter in communication with the souls of dead persons, the mystic seeks union with God alone and is not satisfied with anything short of his sublime goal.

Mysticism is also very remote from all the schools and cults trying to use a knowledge of so called spiritual laws to obtain advantages in the earthly life, such as health, wealth, employment or social or sentimental successes. While finding no fault with the often excellent souls who tarry along the roadside and are enthralled by its illusory scenery, the mystics are interested only in another life in which all human needs and limitations shall disappear in the relinquishment of the self-concern of the Old Man of St. Paul. They have taken to heart the message of Christ that His kingdom is not of this world, and nothing short of His kingdom will satisfy them. Yet it would be entirely wrong to ascribe to mysticism a fierce and sorrowful antagonism to life, its votaries taking delight in the affliction of self — torments and even desecration. It is true that some mystics misguided by false religious ideas and misled zeal have inflicted upon themselves some horrible and repellent tortures, but these have been very exceptional cases, and on the whole, far from being failures in the art of appreciating and enjoying life, mystics seem to be much more successful in it than the average run of world-bound men. In a striking confirmation of Jesus's promise: "Seek ye first the kingdom

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of heaven and its righteousness" it seems that their intense concentration on the spiritual realities and values deprives all their earthly trials of the power to hurt, and the serene joy of the mystics, of the Franciscans for instance, is proverbial. Whatever worldly pleasures they have forsaken, are more than compensated by new joys of a much higher order. But it is very important to note that these personal joys are only a by-product of the mystic quest, and never constitute its aim, which is none other than to attain divine communion in complete surrender of any personal ends whatsoever.

While holding firmly to their beliefs in the promise of Jesus that all the desirable and worthy things of this world shall ensue as a result from an alignment of men's lives with the seeking of the Kingdom of Heaven, they think that it is almost a travesty of Christianity to practise religious loyalty in consideration of its promised rewards.

Mysticism must also be differentiated from some pursuits which although remote from sober academical trends of thought, have none the less such a vast following that sociologists cannot ignore them. Thus it is very different from the various brands of Occultism. While these are concerned with the hidden and invisible world, and while they are often prompted by the very high motive of trying to understand the transcendent laws of life in order to live in closer harmony with the will of the Great Architect of the Universe, the mystic would reproach them with being concerned primarily with the processes of the creation and preservation of things, instead of laying the main accent on the flight from the many to the One.

Finally Mysticism is also to be differentiated from the variegated forms of psychism, such as clairvoyance, clair-audience, psychometry and the like. All these are concerned with the perception of concrete and distinct objects, whether material or more ethereal, whereas the mystic shifts his interests from objects to their cause, from creation to the Creator.



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After this preliminary discrimination, we now come to the survey of the positive characters of mysticism.

To all those who have had mystical experiences and are able to analyse them in the light of philosophical criticism, their first outstanding character is their immediacy. While ordinary experiences are all based on a fundamental dualism between our focus of consciousness and some object, either actually exterior, or resulting from our observations of exterior objects as is the case of general ideas; mystical experience does not seem to come from somewhere, so to speak, but to spring immediately from the very centre of our being, even if the sensation received is felt to have an origin vastly transcendent to the limitations of the subject. Even if the mystic is compelled by the shortcomings of speech to describe his experience as a beholding or a contemplation, both terms implying dualism and consequently a positional or spatial relation, there is the inexpressible feeling of inner connection, of continuity, which has been described as union.

The second general character of mystical experiences is ineffability. Both because of the unusual nature of their processes, and of the fact that their objects are transcendent to those of the usual perceptions which originated our ordinary psychological activity and our languages, which have been called crystallized psychologies, mystics find it impossible to convey their experiences to their sense-bound contemporaries. At best their descriptions can have but a symbolic or allegorical value.

And yet, for all its ineffability, the mystical experience has an irresistible claim on the asset of the subject. This is another of its characteristics. Perhaps because of its intimate immediacy, as it seems to surge from the very centre of the heart, as much as to originate in a supremely transcendent source of reality, the subject feels completely uplifted above the usual necessity of the interpretation of experiences pertaining to an outer world prior to their trustworthy ac-

ceptance and assimilation. It seems to be above the very possibility of error, since the process is not one of absorption or assimilation but of being born as it were to a new quality or dimension, of inclusive awareness.

It has been held by W. James and others that transiency was one of the essential characteristics of mystical experience. "*Amicus Plato, sed magis amicus veritas . . .*" I cannot subscribe to this. While it is true that in the incipient stages, mystical experiences are of a fickle and evanescent nature, this is a purely occasional feature and many advanced mystics describe habitual states of communion lasting for prolonged periods of time, either accompanied by complete oblivion of the outer world or by a relegation of ordinary relations with the "milieu" to what is known as a "Second state" of automatic functioning. Thus mystical experiences cannot be said to be more specifically transient than any of the other modes of awareness of the stream of consciousness.

Another characteristic of mysticism is of the highest importance. It is its passivity. It may be true that some forms of extasis seem to result from the deliberate practice of the methods of Yoga, yet even in those special cases, at the supreme culmination of induced extasis, there is always a moment of uplifting response from on high. This touch of the Holy Ghost, as Catholics would call it, removes the last limits and the last ponderous obstacles to the illimited irruption of infinite omnitude in what I would call the apotheosised field of consciousness. All great mystics, even among the old Greek philosophers, have stressed the intervention of a transcendent factor independent of the subject, and which grants as an inestimable favour, the final unfettering of the soul, allowing its consummate union with the Source of its being. Since this gift of Grace concludes and supersedes a period of intense aspiration, ending in a feeling of utmost surrender, it has been universally likened to the total trusting and loving abandon of the bride to her beloved in the mystical marriage of the soul.



This passivity and self-surrender is one of the most characteristic as well as one of the most significant conditions of mystical experience. It not only includes all tendencies to self-concern and self-preservation, but it also extends to all active intellectual exercise of critical and analytical discrimination. It has been a repeated occurrence that the least active effort to analyse and take stock of a mystical experience, seems to precipitate the subject abruptly back in the hard and fast limitations of the dualistic consciousness, obliterating the all-inclusivity of the higher and wider vision.

These general characteristics of mystical experiences are abstracted from innumerable individual cases. In many of these they were not all given. Not only is the mystical experience purely personal and incommunicable, but it may vary in the same individual according to the successive levels of his development or even to his passing moods and dispositions. Hence the difficulty of an exhaustive investigation of the nature of mystical experience and of a comprehensive definition and appraisal of its data. We shall now try to formulate the general ideas to which it has given form and attempt a summary sketch of its modalities and development.

The fundamental idea of mysticism is that the essence of life and of the world is an all-embracing spiritual substance, which is the reality in the core of all beings, irrespective of their outer appearances or activities. Then comes the assertion of the duality of human personality. One aspect of human nature, the man of familiar practical experience, is formed by its relations with the universe of material objects with which it enters in contact through the senses and which is the origin not only of the characteristics of our bodily organisms, but also of the very modalities of our sentimental life and of our intellectual activity, both conditioned by our representations of the world of objects.

The other aspect of human nature is held not to be caused by our relations with, and functional reactions to the world

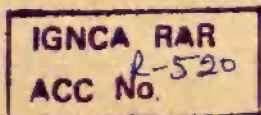
of forms but to be immediately derived from our intimate participation in the universal spiritual substance of life. In the same manner that our bodily senses, created by our functioning in the world of diversity, keep us informed of its modifications and differences; the higher aspect of our nature, acting as an intermediary between the Supreme Universal Reality and our circumscribed person, is endowed with the faculty to become cognizant of the modalities of the transcendent realm to which it pertains. This is held to be the origin of the mystical faculty.

The third general theoretical principle of mysticism is that there is a basic divergence between our two natures. Each one is directed towards the particular realm whence it derived its being, and thrives according to the amount of attention and interest it receives from the individual. Hence the necessity of subduing the earthly interests and appetites, in order to allow the spiritual faculties to develop fully so as to bring the individual to the new birth which will mark his conscious awakening to the fact of his intrinsic belonging to the realm of spiritual Unity.

The process of self discipline and development has been universally likened to a way taking man from this world to the one above. This "way", known to the Chinese as the Tao, to Moslems as the Tariqat, is the "Via Mystica" of Christian Theology. It embodies the old Greek idea of "Method" Meta-en-odos, the way beyond. In India, where the notion of the identity of the beginning and of the end, of the Alpha and the Omega, is more generally accepted and the illusory nature of empirical man more readily acknowledged, the concept of a progress is replaced by that of a transmuting realization of the eternally inherent spiritual unity in man's essence.

The general mystic method, the way leading from the experience of existence in our customary world of separate limited objects defined and really imagined by the senses to a new life in a world of unlimited being and freedom,

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above the limitations imposed on beings by the masks of their personal attributes, has been described with an amazing degree of similitude by the mystics of all races and of all faiths. Following upon the systematizations of Greek philosophy, Christian authors describe three stages or successive mystical ways, the purgative, the illuminative and the contemplative.

The purgative way consists in the preliminary elimination of worldly interests and the eradication of the passions originating from them.

When the soul has succeeded in freeing itself from the coarse appetites and of the grosser allurements of materiality, it receives in a proportionate measure an increased enlightenment from its higher aspects which find more possibilities of expression in the newly 'liberated sectors of consciousness, as a garden plant produces a new abundance of flowers when the weeds sapping its nutrition are removed. This second part of the mystic apotheosis is the illuminative way.

The supreme stage, the contemplative way, is entered upon when the battle against the old man of the earthy nature having been won, the objective visions of a world of glory of the *via illuminativa*, are replaced by the experience of union between the mystic subject and the divine object of his quest. This is the supreme achievement of human destiny, the return of the differentiated creature to the resplendent infinitude of the Creator.

The practical value of a survey of mysticism is two-fold. First it provides a new hope in the magnificent scope of human possibilities and in the glory of our calling, with its message that not only is God in his heaven, in the eternal glory of an unbounded perfection, but that as a gigantic scale of Jacob, there is a way leading aspiring souls to the exalted heights of the infinite fullness of the Spirit. Further, it provides us with the elements of a measure of understanding of the nature of the mysterious universe which is

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intermediary between the absolute unity of the Divine perfection of the Creator and the bondage of the limiting forms and attributes of the realm of material objects, to which our consciousness is usually confined.

In the measure in which mystics succeed in giving a faithful account of the subtle features of the ethereal world above our dense one, they give us the first elements of a clue to some of the possibilities of the realm of transitions between physical and metaphysical processes into which the different branches of modern physics are beginning to probe.

But we face here a potent difficulty. It is increasingly admitted that in their interpretation of their experiences, mystics are readily influenced by the images and ideas of their particular religion which led them to force the aspects of their new experiences in the old moulds of their religious tenets. The study of the psychological conditions of illusion has shown us how easy it is to read expected traits and characters in an experience which is not of the utmost clarity and definition. The mystics have an almost irresistible tendency to organize their strange and subtle experiences along the patterns provided by their religious education.

Thus, while the intrinsic quality of their contact with the transcendent reality is in no way impaired, because it takes place above the world of forms and formulations, the informative value of their accounts risks to be sterilized from the start. Of course, this does not disturb the type of minds which attach an exclusive importance to the literal aspect of religion. They would have any use for mysticism, or for anything else, only in the measure in which it can serve to confirm their own interpretations of their sacred texts.

But, we are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that the main religious problem of the day is not so much to insist on the irrecusable value of religious texts in themselves, than to find ways and means to enable religion to exercise again a powerful influence on the creative activities



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of men. It is obvious that in the present stalemate of religious efficacy in the Western World, a mere confirmation of the presently impotent formulas would not lead us much further than the extant achievements of organized religion. The study of the mystics of the different denominations, in the literatures of these denominations, runs the risk of being exposed to the sterility which has been ascribed to logic as a means of discovery, and which comes from the fact that it can only give in its conclusion that which has already been introduced in the premises.

On the contrary, the method of a comparative study of mysticism enables us to begin to make a distinction between those aspects of religious experience which have been coloured by traditional group-representations and those which their similarity in the mystics of different faiths authorize us to believe to be based more on real experience than on the dictum of ingrained and perhaps arbitrary preformations.

In the following lectures, we shall aim at the same time to give a general idea of the religious and social atmosphere which has constituted the background of preformed religious images which have provided mystics with ready-made elements of interpretation of their experiences, and also to reconstitute as much as possible, the sense of the living warmth and tremendous uplifting power of the free and pure aspects of the experiences of the forerunners of mankind as they were able to lift a corner of the veil separating our world of effects from the world of causes.

Our materialistic civilization, in which quantity smothers quality, and in which machines and money count for more than men and spiritual values, is bankrupt. The main cause of our worldwide chaos and confusion lies in the present failure of religion to provide the needed ideal incentives and moral restrictions. Total reconstruction of our world requires as a preliminary condition a revivification of practical ethics of which religion has proven, so far, to be the only efficient source. America is still the most religious country

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in Christendom. If there is to be a religious renaissance in the West, it should take place here.

A study of mysticism is capable of instilling in the religious life of our day the element of fervour which it is lacking. May I express the hope that these lectures may contribute, if only in a modest measure, to awaken a renewed interest in the message of the most advanced sons of mankind, whose ardent zeal has carried to the realm of unity and peace.



Sri Aurobindo National  
Centre for the Arts



## LECTURE II

### *Indian Mysticism, Its Scope and Methods*

A SURVEY of the great schools of mysticism now extant begins with that of India, because it antedates all other branches of the human family if not actually in metaphysical speculation, at least in its recorded expression. Most if not all of the metaphysical problems encountered by other mystics were previously recognized by the ancient seers of India who evolved subtle solutions for them. Most if not all of the tenets of other mystical theologies have been formulated at an anterior date in India, often with deeper analytical acumen and more comprehensive scope.

Whether the posterior expressions of views already developed in India came from her directly or were due to the universal faculties of the human mind solving in all countries the same problems in the same way, it is indeed interesting that all the great problems brought up by men's aspirations to divine gnosis and union should have been encountered by the sages of early India. In fact it seems as if the metaphysical genius of man had already attained its complete development in pre-historical India since the ancient Rishis both in their analysis of the phases of mystical experiences and in the systematization of their data, reached a completeness only sporadically attained in other systems.

Thus were it not for the, let us say, isolationism of most religions tending to make them consider their doctrines as entirely original as well as of exclusory efficacy, an enquiry into mysticism might well rest with the study of Indian mystical theology. But this would defeat the very object of comparative mysticism which is to put the study of spiritual experiences on a scientific footing by freeing

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its universal data from the impositions of the ready-made images of traditional literalism. Yet a complete study of the development of Indian mystical theology is out of place here, even if it provides adequate answers for the great metaphysical problems, some of which still baffle theologians of other faiths. Covering practically the whole field of metaphysical speculation, it must be relegated to exhaustive treatises. We must rest content with a short outline of the main tenets of Indian mystical philosophy without attempting a description of their evolution from the early Vedic Naturism to their present position. Among the various metaphysical systems of India, the school of Yoga whose very object is to achieve, here and now, the mystical union of the human soul with its spiritual principle is the most representative in the field of mystical study. We shall use it as a basis for our survey....

The Yoga spiritual philosophy and its methods leading to mystical union are in harmony with the great traditional Hindu doctrine of salvation. Generally speaking, this starts from the premise that the goal of salvation or union is not a faraway and exterior objective but is an immanent condition latent in the heart of man, like the Kingdom of God of the Christians, and which must be regained by the dispelling of the error and ignorance causing man to cling to the erroneous belief that he is a limited and separate entity instead of an aspect of the one spiritual reality.

True knowledge of the nature of things, "Vidya", is for most Hindu schools the real agent of liberation. By a process similar to the Christian conception of creation by the "Word", the creation of manifested objects is held to be due to their formulation by a creator. It endows them with "the form of the name" 'Nama Rupa' according to the Isha Upanishad. This comes very near to the Platonic theory of the creation of beings through the projection of archetypal Ideas.

Originally man was considered as having to rely solely on his own efforts in his endeavours to achieve liberating



union. The Gods of the Vedic pantheon were only the subjected agents of involution to which they were compelled to collaborate in a process corresponding somewhat to the activities of the Elohim of the ancient Hebrews. Although they played an all important part in his coming into being, they cannot help man in any way along the path of his return to the Infinite. Accordingly, rogatory prayer was not considered to be necessary. Also it was not possible to offend those Gods. They did not belong to the realm of secondary and active manifestation to which man acceded, when after the downward course of collective and passive involution, he emerged as a free agent entering on the individual path of voluntary evolution. Sin considered as offending a personalized God was replaced by the chains engendered by ignorance which led man to misguided actions running contrary to the great laws of cosmic harmony. Out of these inharmonious encounters, ensued estrangement, separation and bondage, resulting from the deviation of man's action from the great universal law.

The idea of the essential unity of all life, from the Gods to man and even to the least creature, which is the corner stone of mysticism, was specially stressed by the Upanishads. These steer a course between the dryness of abstract metaphysics and the old ritualistic magic of the Vedic age. Ever seeking the One they find Him in a sublime region above all description and limiting personal traits. Let us listen to these oldest monuments of metaphysical expression "All this is Brahman . . . He is myself in the interior of the heart, smaller than the germ of the smallest seed. He is also myself in the heart chamber, greater than the earth, greater than Heaven, greater than the heavens, greater than all these worlds" (Chhandogya Upan). "Thou art man, Thou art woman, Thou art boys, Thou art girls, Thou art an old man tottering on his stick, Thou art created with thy face turning on all sides, Thou art the dark blue bee, Thou art the red-eyed parrot, Thou art the stormy cloud, the seas, the seasons. Thou art without beginning. Thou art

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infinite, Thou, from whom proceed all universes" (Svetasvatara Up).

In their description of God the Upanishads give us the first instance of the negative method which was to be so much used by Christian and Moslem theology. "He, the Self, must be described by No, No. He is incomprehensible since He cannot be grasped" (Brahadaranyaka Up). Consequently, the Divine Self, Atman, is silence, ineffable obscurity as He was to be described later by Christian mystics. He is at the same time everything, since He enfolds the whole universe; and nothing, because He is without attributes.

Man is immersed in the All and has no other reality than this participation in Him. This is the basis of all Mysticism, the justification of man's effort towards spiritual Union. The great obstacle to the perception of man's intrinsic infinitude is self-consciousness, the illusion that man is a separate entity, distinct from, and opposed to the Universe. The conquest of this illusion and of the cycles of ego-centric thought and action based upon it constitute the task of the mystic. He is told "The Self is a dike, a border, when its rand has been transcended, the night becomes truly day, for the world of Brahman is enlightened without end" (Chhandogya Up). This led to the famous definition of God as: "the One without a second", "Ekam adwaitam". This unity of man's essential being and of the Divine is repeatedly stressed. Udalaka Aruni told his son "All that exists has its being in the subtle essence. It is the Real, it is the Self, and Thou O Swetaketu, thou art That" (Chhandogya Up). This metaphysical notion of a transcendent, abstract and impersonal monism seems cold to the soul hungering for a Divine Object to adore. Although most of their approach to the transcendent is along the line of metaphysical abstraction, we find also in the Upanishads some strains of love, announcing the affectionate outbursts of the devotees of Krishna, that Hindu forerunner of our "Good Shepherd." "In the same way as when a man is



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embraced by a beloved woman, he perceives nothing within and nothing without, thus this person who is embraced by the Self-intelligent (Prajna) knows nothing within, nothing without." This is an anticipation of Ruysbroek's description of the "obscure silence wherein all lovers lose themselves."

We also find a remarkable anticipation of the Christian doctrine of the necessity of Grace in order to attain salvation in Divine Union, "The Self cannot be reached by the Vedas, neither by understanding nor by much study. Only him whom the Self chooses, by him can the Self be reached" (Katha Up. IV, 23). The irrational character of the process of union which transcends all intellectual logical efforts, is repeatedly stressed in terms pregnant with mystical awareness "He alone grasps Him who does not grasp Him. Anyone who understands Him does not know Him. Unknown of the knower, known of him who does not know. The one in whom awakening takes place, that one grasps Him and obtains immortality" (Kena Up. XI, 17).

Yet if the necessity of Grace is acknowledged, nothing could be further remote from the spirit of Hinduism than the restrictive Calvinistic idea of the predetermination of salvation. Hindu teachers admit that man is incapable of reaching God by his own unaided efforts. He must be lifted above individual limitations by a spark from the Infinite. But this help is not the result of caprice or hazard. It is the outcome of the essential relations between the Creator and His Mayavic universe. The Ever-Present in all men's hearts is forever seeking self achievement and self expression in and through them. Thus He provides a perpetual incentive to spiritual aspirations. He pours upon the soul a constant appeal which corresponds to Christian Grace. But that universal and constant appeal cannot be equally perceived by all men. It is received only by those who have qualified themselves to open their hearts to it, by developing the faculty of looking in the right direction, not without where the mind is ensnared by illusory perceptions, but within, where the One is forever established. "The Self existent has

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pierced the opening of the senses so that they are facing forward, consequently men look forward and not backwards. Yet a Sage who had closed his eyes and aspired to immortality saw the Self by turning backwards" (Katha Up). This is strangely similar to an image used by Plotinus who compared a group of men using discursive reason to several faces turned toward the exterior world but inwardly connected with one single mind. Those faces beheld different outer spectacles. But, if one of us like unto those faces, could turn around toward the interior through his own efforts or with the help of Athena (note this appeal to grace, also in the religion of the Beautiful) he would behold at the same time God, his own self and the whole. It is also a forerunner of the precept of the Koran, "Close your eyes, O believers."

We have to notice another nuance which will help us to realize how comprehensive and synthetic is Hindu religious thought. The two rival cults of Vishnu and Shiva afford complementary approaches to the mystical path. We saw that the Vedas conceived the personalized Gods as subjected to the Law of Causality. After the primitive polytheism of the Vedas, appeared the pantheistic idea of a single and transcendent divine principle, Ishvara, who under His three aspects Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, engenders this universe through the operations of Maya, which is even the cause of the appearance of the personified aspects of the Holy Trimurti "I am born through my power of Maya" says Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita... (IV).

Vishnavism considers this world of Maya as supported by divine love, and since the transcendent Ishvara is not subjected to the mechanical cosmic laws, he is capable, under His Krishna aspect, of saving his beloved devotees from the clutches of the world of rebirth and pain. This corresponds to the Christian concept of salvation by loving grace, which rescues man from the impositions of the materialistic world of the Law of the Old Testament, bound to time and space and their mechanical determinism. For Shivaism,



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the other great cult of India, the problem of the origin of evil and suffering provides the key to the interpretation of life and to liberation. Maya is not only the cause of the creation of beings but also of their transformations. The divine aspect presiding over the evolution of forms is Shiva and his efficient power Kali. Shiva is the moving principle of the great world-wheel of the evolution of corporeal beings. In his realm, the soul wanders, subject to affliction until it is liberated by understanding which dispels the illusions of Maya. But whereas Vishnu was full of love for suffering creatures, Shiva is not concerned with their feelings or even with their being, but only with their becoming. His dance produces the world and keeps the wheel in motion until He sees fit to annihilate the universe, like a marionette player allowing the puppets to disappear when the show is over.

Thus we see that already in the pre-epic time of India most of the great religious problems had been formulated by the cults of the different aspects of the Trinity and by the preceding Upanishads. The Bhagavad Gita was really a taking of stock, comparing the doctrines of current religious forms and particularly the two great philosophical schools which were emerging out of the general religious tradition : the Sankhya and the Yoga.

The Sankhya insists on the importance of learning. Man must study diligently the laws presiding over the formation of the universe of objects through the operations of the three qualities of manifesting life, the three Gunas: Rajas, fiery passionate activity, Tamas, torpid inertia and Sattva, harmony between torpor and feverish activity in conformity with the latent rhythm of divine manifestation in the world process. Man must also study the relations between matter, spirit and God. This knowledge dispelling the snares of Maya is the avenue leading to salvation. Yet if Knowledge is held to be a necessary condition, it is not considered as sufficient in itself to lead to final liberation. The ultimate

key to liberation is adoration "the love of the Lord" which Christ prescribed as the all essential religious law.

Thus the intellectual approach to Divine Reality culminates in a supramental act of adoration. This is even more so in Yoga, which although resting also on an elaborate philosophy, lays a great emphasis on the emotional approach. It asserts that "The love of the Lord is better than much knowledge." This reminder had to be stressed before describing the great Yoga school of the technique of divine Union, with its concept of the nature of God, of man and its different methods of union.

Yoga describes two radically different aspects of God, the higher, corresponding to the ineffable and transcendent Godhead, the other to the creatively active God. Nirguna Brahman, God anterior to existence and without attributes, is the mysterious source out of which emerges the creator, Saguna Brahman, endowed with specific attributes and powers. In Saguna Brahman appear the features of Ishvara, the manifesting Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

Out of the operations of Saguna Brahman as the Trimurti, proceed the three great essences of the manifested universe: Atma or Purushottma, the eternal soul of the world, Purusha, the actual and temporal spiritual principle, and Mulaprakriti, the essential principle of matter.

Corresponding to the three causal "tiers" of the universe, the real man, the spirit, is also threefold, composed of three divine aspects. The inferior spiritual soul Jivatma, is completely immersed in the series of reincarnations and subjected to the binding consequences of Karma, which is attaching man to the perturbations engendered in the Cosmic harmony by erroneous activity misled by sensory illusions.

The upper spiritual soul Pratyagatma, although not completely immersed in the incarnating personality, is subjected to the binding limitations engendered by Karma, but only indirectly, through its intimate connection with Jivatma, its offshoot in manifestation.



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The supreme soul, Paramatma, completely free, self-existent, real, eternal, and immediately related to Purushottama, is not caught in the web of incarnation nor subjected in any way to the restricting conditions of Karma.

From the operations of Purusha, the manifesting spiritual principle, upon Prakriti, the Cosmic virgin matter or Virgin world mother, spring the three gunas, Rajas, Tamas, Sattva. Fermenting again, in the bosom of Ishvara, Purusha acting on Rajas, produces the first aspect of the Trinity, Brahma, the creative aspect of God or God the Father.

Playing on Tamas, inertia, Purusha engenders Shiva, the divine aspect immersing life in forms, and destroying forms in order to free the life in them, while also preparing the appearance of other forms for it. Playing on Sattva, Purusha engenders Vishnu, the loving copula between the two other aspects of the Trinity and principle of cohesion, preservation, harmony and universal transmitter of life to the world. The relationship of the Vishnu and Shiva aspects of the creative deity with the cosmic principles of Love and Hate of Empedocles is obvious.

Ishvara, the threefold creator emerging out of the supreme Nirguna Brahma, is endowed with three essential attributes: Being, Sat, Consciousness, Chit, and infinite Felicity, Ananda.

These three essential aspects of the Divine Reality permeate the whole universe. The degree of their manifestation depends on the degree of organization of the beings through which the divine activity is functioning. All objects are reflections of the three aspects of the Divine Nature: being, consciousness and felicity; but their awareness, their capacity to reflect consciously the divine characters, is conditioned by the quality of their tissues, the sensitivity and responsiveness of their organs, the maturity of their faculties and of their adaptation to their functions. Hindu metaphysical psychology describes four degrees of consciousness corresponding to the three great Cosmic divisions and to the transcendent Absolute.

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The lowest quality of consciousness is that of waking activity, Jagrat. The soul is caught in the maze of sensory perceptions, each one a snare due to the constitution of the senses which are incapable of giving a true account of the objects setting them into activity. Therefore in Jagrat man is a prisoner, subjected passively to the impositions of a world of artificial and deceptive images. Hence, it has been likened to Shiva, the differentiating principle producing forms by imposing limitations on the creative impulsions originating from Brahma. Each embodied being can be considered as the journey's end of a divine creative impulse, as the grave, putting an end to an evolutionary course which originated on the subtle and limitless planes of Creation. Thus Shiva, the God which is producing forms and bodies is truly the principle of death. He is closely related to intellectual knowledge, which being based on discrimination between the various objects of the outside world and also between the outside world and ourselves, is the cause of the appearance in man's consciousness of the notion of his separate entity, of his restricted and isolated self-consciousness, the belief in his particular existence as distinct from, and opposed to the rest of the Cosmos. "The break in the normal and natural order of things in the human life is directly traceable to man's mentality, the way in which he knows himself and distinguishes himself from others" (Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, p. 43).

Swapna, the second degree of consciousness, is that of dreaming. Intermediary between the limitations of our waking consciousness and higher contemplation which is unlimited and consequently indefinite, it corresponds to the second person of the Trinity, Vishnu. Represented in his Rama avatar or as Krishna, He is the transmitter of all the original creative impulsion, the agent of Cosmic cohesion and constant adapting harmony of which love is the translation in human experience. In the same way that Vishnu is the intermediary between Brahma, the infinite, formless



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originator of life and Shiva, the principle of definition, objectivation and transformation; dream is the intermediary between the receptive waking consciousness passively subjected to the phantasmagory of the senses, and the supreme liberty of deep dreamless slumber, where no outside solicitation impinges upon the mirror of the soul to constrain it into conformity and conformation to external limited and limiting images. Although the materials of our dream-images come from the outside illusory world, yet the way in which they are organized, the sequence of events in our dreams is not actually imposed from outside, but is largely the result of our own creative activity. Thus, while Jagrat, waking, is entirely submitted to the world of illusion, Swapna, dreaming, being largely subjective is free in the same measure.

The highest form of separate consciousness is called Sushupti. It is that of deep dreamless sleep. In it man is free both from constraining outer influences and from the arbitrary selective restrictions of mental activity. He is liberated from the desecrating and misconstruing impositions of the two localizing elements, on the one hand self-centeredness, the subjective opposition to the objective universe, and on the other hand, the sentiment of our objectivated personal being, of our manifold organized person located between this self-conscious centre and the surface of its contact with and its resistance to, the outer world. In different ways, many philosophers from Aristotle to Kant and Bergson among the moderns, have considered the tension of will, ranging from the mere will to live to the will to carry-out the dictum of duty, as being the essential and central character of human consciousness. In Sushupti, the soul transcends any form of response to, or conflict with any outer agent. It is thus lifted above the duality of subject-object consciousness up to the all inclusive world of unity. It is no longer centered nor localized, which means restricted. If it has lost the "*Unterscheidungsempfindlichkeit*" the capacity to perceive differences, considered as the origin of conscious

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perception, this is due not to a deterioration of its nature and functioning, but to a liberation. This liberation from inclusion in the limitations of the world of the fall, introduces man to the supreme mode of consciousness "Turya". It is the glorious ineffable contemplation in which the soul participates fully in the basic, essential continuous life of Ishvara under its treble superconscious aspects of Sat, Chit, Ananda, being, potential consciousness and felicity.

The Yogi's ambition is to attain this exalted liberation. The fetters of the soul are of a double nature. Man is enslaved both by his attachment to the illusory objects of this world of appearances and by his self identification with the elementary vitality of his body and faculties, mere instruments he has developed to function in the world of time and space limitations. Therefore to reach liberation he not only has to control all yearnings for outer objects but also to detach himself from all the organs and aspects of his earthly being.

The Hindu tradition considers man as constituted of twenty-seven elements: five senses or organs of perception, the Gnanendriyas; five organs of action, Karmendriyas; five vital breaths, Pranas; five invisible essences, Tanmatras; four internal mental organs, Antakarana; and three spiritual souls or aspects of Atma: Jivatma, Pratyagatma and Paramatma. The four very important organs constituting Antakarana, the connecting link between the earthly envelopes and the spiritual entity or real man are: Manas which discerns, compares and analyses, Buddhi which judges and chooses, Ahamkara, the organ of self-consciousness and Chitta, pure consciousness, void even of subjectivity and akin to the Chit aspect of the three modes of Ishvara: Sat, Chit, Ananda.

To achieve this control of the bodies and free themselves from identification with even the Antakarana, Yogis have developed comprehensive systems of exercises and discipline affecting all human activities. The number of these systems



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is considerable, since there have been so many Gurus or spiritual teachers in the long course of India's history. Fortunately, most of them can be reduced to a few general composite disciplines. The classification of Yoga schools is based on the particular Upadhi or vehicle to which special attention is given. The general technique of all schools is to so completely master one faculty that union is reached with its archetype, the divine creative purposive impulse which gave it birth and keeps it in activity.

The humblest of all schools is that of Hatha Yoga, seeking union through the physical body. Its followers are looked upon as elementary and somewhat crude representatives of the great Yoga tradition. This is because, owing to the degeneration which is liable to set in in all very ancient institutions, many modern exponents of Hatha Yoga, losing sight of its exalted end, spend their time in seeking control over usually automatic functions of the body such as heart beats, peristaltic motions of the intestines, heat regulation, etc. This enables them to perform freakish tricks, amazing to the childish curiosity-hunting tourists. But it is hardly fair to judge Hatha Yoga from them. The real purpose of Hatha Yoga is not to control the functions of the body but to gain union with the aspect of Creative consciousness which is at work in the substance of the bodily organs. This is accomplished by going back from what we call kinesthesia and coenesthesia, the consciousness of our movements and of our organic processes, to the operations of the divine creative life at work in them. This, of course, lifts up Hatha Yoga above the plane of material wonder-working to that of spirituality, even if it is in the realm of involution.

Above Hatha Yoga two schools aim at working upon the so called etheric plane. This is the last downward stage of the creative impulses before reaching complete physical manifestation. In the Hindu conception of what Christian theologians call the "Continuous creation" of the world, the constant creative purpose of the Supreme Cause is

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poured out, as it were, through a successive series of differentiating and organizing agencies. These correspond to the seven angelic hosts, each going one step further in preparing the particular creative impulse to achieve its final purpose until, from a pure act of will of the Lord, it becomes a limited, circumscribed, definite body on the physical plane. Thus the world of material objects can be compared to the final stage on the assembly line of the creative operations of the universal plant. The theory is that Creation on the etheric plane is not yet completely crystallized as on the physical plane and thus is more amenable to modifying influences.

The two schools seeking union through control of etheric conditions are those of Laya Yoga and Mantra Yoga. Both use the magic of sound as a means to harmonize the last stage of creative operations and restore harmonious conditions when these have been perturbed. This perturbation of the divine creative activity, causing all the inharmonious conditions in the world, results from misguided human activity, either in the actual performance of evil actions or in erroneous ideas and desires, all these altering the orderly course of manifestation to introduce sources of disease and disharmony. This is the mechanism of the evil influence of sin. Hindu theology would hold that Jesus was alluding to that power of human sentiments to introduce disturbing causes in cosmic harmony when He said that if a man desired his neighbour's wife in his heart, he had already sinned. Laya and Mantra Yogis seek union with the Divine through His operations on the etheric plane. This is attained by becoming conscious of the Divine presence in the operations tending to keep our being in manifestation. But before the Divine can be sensed in these operations, they have to be purged from any deviating and corrupting influence. They must be brought back to pristine harmony with the pure purpose of the Lord, the pure form of the Nama Rupa. Disorderly and disruptive conditions have to be cleansed and rectified by the use of magical incantations whose sound



waves are destined to restore the etheric creative processes to harmony with the divine pattern as a comb brings conformity in dishevelled hair. Some incantations are supposed to operate through their capacity to create centres of harmony on the etheric plane and to induce a corresponding harmony in the successively more spiritual centres of the Antakarana, hence their name of "Laya (place) Yoga". Mantra Yoga is conceived as working not only on the etheric plane but as reaching to the anterior planes of creative sentiment and ideas; through the efficacy of the dynamic thought-aspect of their formulas when used by Yogis whose understanding of the dynamics of thought as well as of sound, enables them to rectify perturbed conceptual conditions.

Bhakti Yoga is the quest of union through sanctified sentiment. It is the Yoga of love, the greatest of mystic schools. It reaches union through the harmonization of the love nature of man with its prescribed destiny, which is to manifest, in all its purity, the Divine Love of the Creator under its treble aspect of life-giver, preserver and upholder. It is because the loving principle in man is deviated towards unworthy selfseeking purposes that the divine harmony and felicity latent in man's heart is perturbed and eradicated. By abandoning all narrow and self-centered affections, man allows the Divine Love, upholding all beings in manifestation, to assert itself pure and unalloyed in his interior universe. Forsaking the desert of evanescent appearances, the devotee's love is directed solely to the One ineffable Reality. By uniting wholly his love nature with that portion of the divine aspect of love and cohesion which is giving him life, man reaches the divine union of mystic love.

Bhakti Yogis adore the objectified, personalized and active aspect of the Infinite, Ishvara or Saguna Brahma. Bhakti Yoga presents three degrees. The elementary one, Bhaya Bhakti is the worship of the Gods through formulas, images, rites, etc. The second, Ananya Bhakti is the cult of the

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transcendent but objective monotheistic God. The third degree, Ekanta Bhakti, is interior and silent adoration of the Ineffable Formless, Ubiquitous Presence.

The path of union through the processes of seeking truth, knowledge and wisdom has given rise to the schools of Vidya Yoga, Gnana Yoga and Raja Yoga. In these disciplines, Yoga is sought through the harmonization of man's thinking principle with Chit or conscious aspect of the trinity of God's manifesting attributes. Through thought discipline and exclusion of all limiting thought-forms from the thinking instrument, union is reached with the pure basic element of potential thought in the Cosmos, and through it, with the Creator. It is the glorious apotheosis of the long process of truth-seeking through the thinking faculty which transcends itself, in self immolation, to lead the thinker, when he has gone beyond formulated thinking, to the radiant condition of Turyatita or ineffable transcendence of cosmic consciousness.

Above the Yogas of thought, two schools of spiritual Yoga are described, those of Prana and Karma Yoga. The Prana Yogis seek liberation through union, on the super plane of their being, with the incipency of the creative operations as they are constantly originating on the exalted regions where the life of the individual connects with the Divine Cause of all life. Constantly, the infinite, homogeneous, continuous Source of all reality is, so to speak, irradiating creative energies which maintain the existence of all beings. This universal creative energy reaches separate entities through a process of selective differentiation which encases the creative energy, or Prana, in increasingly coarser differentiation of itself until it reaches and vivifies bodily sheaths. The Prana Yogi seeks communion with it, not at the stage where it upholds the atomic energy as in Hatha Yoga but when it emerges, as it were, from indifferentiation on its way towards manifestation. Therefore this is a Yoga in which union is sought with the undifferentiated stream of life's energy as it wells out of the Divine Source.



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Karma Yoga seeks union through consecrated action. The Karma Yogis aim at complete control of their personality, subduing its self-conscious, self-centred desires, so that their actions will cease to be ego-centric to become cosmocentric, in complete harmony with the purposes of the universal One. In a first stage, the candidate seeks to perform all his tasks, professional, familial or civic, in a spirit of dedication to the service of the All Highest. Then comes a process of weeding out all activities which are not directly related to the service of the Lord. The last stage is attained when the doer realizes that he does not really exist as an active agent any more than the objects on which he seems to be acting, and that the only actor is Ishvara, acting through the results of His actions on the results of His actions. The traditional hero of Karma Yoga is Hanuman, the monkey god, embodiment of valour and devotion to duty. As a true Karma Yogi, on his return from his expedition to Lanka to free Sita the captive wife of Rama, when asked for news of the chaste daughter of the God, he answered "I did not see the daughter of Janaka but I saw chastity in person".

The whole existence of the Karma Yogi is a Brahmayajna, a sacrifice to Brahma, his every emotion, thought and action being completely relinquished in favour of the manifestation of the deity through his utter dedication. The successful Karma Yogi becomes a Jivanmukta, who can no longer sin or engender Karma or diverging action since his self will has been completely relinquished in favour of the unalloyed expression of Jiva, the aspect of Atma immersed in time and space, and which constitutes the essential continuity of man's becoming.

The general methods of Yoga, followed more or less closely by all schools, consists of nine successive classes of prescriptions, constituting as many steps leading from ordinary human status to final union. They are as follows:  
I—Yamas: Ten disciplines of material purification dealing with man's conduct towards the material universe. They con-

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sist of the practice of the ten virtues, each to be fully acquired in turn. (1) Ahimsa, complete harmlessness towards all beings including minerals and plants. (2) Satya, absolute veracity. (3) Asteya, indifference to possessions which eliminates any form of covetousness and stealing. (4) Brahmacharya, celibacy. (5) Daya, universal benevolence extending to criminals and even demons. (6) Arjava, complete equanimity in all circumstances. (7) Kshama, patience in unpleasant circumstances. (8) Dhriti, control of mind in unfavourable as well as favourable occurrences. (9) Mitahara, frugality in food. (10) Saucha, purification of the body by prescribed ablutions, and of the mind, by the study of Brahma-vidya, or Theology.

It is interesting to remark that although Brahmanism is often accused of leading to callousness in worldly relations because of the complete absorption of its devotees in the quest of personal salvation, yet the first and sine qua non injunction of Yoga is the practice of all the social virtues.

After the ten worldly purifications of Yama, the second step of Yoga, consists of ten religious purifications. They are the:

II—Niyamas. (1) Tapas, the bodily penance and austerities of asceticism. (2) Santosha, a complete acceptance of the will of the Lord. (3) Astikya, acceptance of the Vedic doctrines on merits and demerits. (4) Daana, charity and generosity. (5) Ishvara puja, worship of the Lord of manifestation. (6) Siddhantanisravaṇa, study of religious philosophy. (7) Hri, repentance and contrition for sins against the law. (8) Mati, life according to scriptures, in faith and love. (9) Japa, reciting prescribed incantations. (10) Vrata, abstaining from forbidden actions.

While the Yamas aiming at the elimination of earthly bondages corresponds to the catharsis of the Greek mystics, or our *via purgativa*, the Niyamas correspond to the *via illuminativa*, as they prepare the soul to harmonize itself with the divine will, as expressed in religious law.



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The third step is :

III — Kriya Yoga, following ritual prescriptions on worship.

IV — Asanas, the practice of postures supposed to facilitate meditation by promoting a favourable circulation of the spiritual fires along the physico-spiritual centres.

V — Pranayama. Purification of breath. Breathing exercises whose aims range from clarification of thought to union with divine energies controlling the breathing functions.

VI — Mantra Yoga. Recitation of prayers and praises of God, similar to Christian litanies and to the Dikr of Moslem Sufis.

While the first stages of Yoga dealt with preparatory purification; and the four intermediary stages, with practices involving the use of the body; the three last stages concern purely subjective control and union. Constituting the elements of Yoga proper, or union, they lead to Samyama, communion in deepest one-pointed meditation. These three superior stages of Yoga practice are :

VII — Dharana. Practice of mental concentration until the mind becomes able to exclude at will any thought from its focus.

VIII — Dhyana. Contemplation, obtained when man is free from attachment to the world and to his ego-centric self and has become master of his very moods through Dharana. Yogis describe three degrees of contemplation which throw a very important light on all the descriptions of mystical experience: The lower one is Sthuladhyana, the contemplation of divine images and scenes. According to the devotee's training he beholds lofty scenes pertaining to his religious concepts, either the resplendent form of Shiva, the "Great God", constantly transmuting all form in the apotheosis of his glory, or the radiant figure of Vishnu standing on a lotus and ever pouring love on all universes, or even the image of his own Guru, or personal master, transfigured by Divine illumination and sitting on a throne of swans.

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Above Sthuladhyana, Tejodhyana is the stage of abstract objective contemplation in which images disappear leaving the soul free to contemplate the pure light of Jivatma, the active aspect of the Spirit. Tejodhyana prepares the soul for the supreme contemplation of Sukshmadhyana. Here total abstraction and consequent obliteration is reached through the full awakening of kundalini, the divine fire in man, which leads to the union of his conscious principle with Atma. The three forms of contemplation are of vastly different value. According to tradition, Tejodhyana is one hundred times more precious than form-bound Sthuladhyana and Sukshmadhyana is a thousand times more precious than still objectivated Tejodhyana. If this classification is valid even as an indication, it provides an important criterion for the appraisal of the various descriptions of mystical experiences. At any rate, it explains the relative scarcity in Indian mystical literature of elaborate descriptions of heavenly objects and relationships as described by many Western Mystics like Swedenborg for instance. The exalted contemplation of Sukshmadhyana leads to the last stage of Yoga: IX — Samadhi. Union. With the Hindu genius for classification Yogis describe many forms of Samadhi according to the particular schools which led to union, but these classifications do not throw much additional light on our subject.

Other schools, describing Samadhi under the name of Liberation, Moksha, distinguish five degrees in Union. The first, Salokya Moksha, results from the intuitive urge to strive towards God without knowing Him. This quest is prompted only by the intuition of the necessity of Union. The second, Samipya Moksha, consists in drawing near to the Sacred One through constant prayer. In the third, Sarupya Moksha, the devotee purified from all selfish bonds attains to the likeness of God. Like the pure in heart of Christianity, he sees God. The fourth, Sayujya Moksha, leads to full access to the Divine and the last, Sarshtitwa



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Moksha, is the permanent union with God after the last aspirations to worldly life have been severed. It corresponds to the final mystical wedding of Santa Teresa.

We could quote many other formulations of the mystical processes and classifications which have been produced by the exuberant metaphysical genius of India, but all can be reduced to the three Sadhanas of Self dedication, Self control and Self immolation, corresponding to the stages of purification, liberation and identification of the universal mystical way.

Hindu religious literature is comparatively poor in descriptions of actual experiences of mystical union. This is due to several causes. The main one lies in the widespread understanding of the deceptive nature of intellectual imagery and affabulation and of their incapacity to give a true account of the Divine Reality which is understood to be above forms and attributes. Another reason is that the practice of spiritual meditation was so widespread and the experience of Samadhi so well known at the time when the great systems were formulated that such descriptions were unnecessary. A clear understanding of the fact that spiritual realities are transcendent to any form, brought spiritual teachers to attach very little importance to the verbal descriptions of mystical experiences. The greatest value of such descriptions is to provide an incentive to spiritual striving for doubting Thomases. This was not needed in a land where belief in spiritual realities was universal. But the main reason for the curtailment of the ejaculations so prominent in other mystical schools is the understanding of the elementary character and inferior value of all visions which are only faltering steps on the inferior degree of Sthuladhyana, dealing with the deceptive world of imagery. The rapturous expressions of the devotee of a personal God when he attains the object of his vision have obviously no interest for the soul who has had access to the Supreme Godhead. For him who returns from the awful union with what is known as "the fullness of the void", in the Absolute Father, the

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enthused rhapsodies of the beholders of personified visions on the psychic plane of objectifying imagination or even of the seers of the colourful fulgurating apocalyptic vistas of the world of "the Son" or of the "Sacred heart" are but disturbing outbursts.

Yet, there are descriptions of the beatific experiences and their sequences. Already in the Vedic age, Yajnavalkya said "Hardly perceptible is the path leading to Me, and which was uncovered by Myself. On it, the sages who have uncovered the nature of Brahma soar towards the world of light, and from there, going even further, are finally liberated." We have here close similarities to Christian teachings. "Hardly perceptible is the path." "I shall come back stealthily" declared He who said He was Life, Truth and the Path: the path "was uncovered by Myself" the necessity of grace. "The sages who have grasped the nature of Brahma . . . are finally liberated". "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" with the indication that liberation is beyond even the world of pure light. Final liberation is an ever recurring theme, "I shall belong to this world of re-incarnation until I am liberated by Moksha. Then I shall return to my true home" (Chhandogya Up). "He who perceives the Perfectly Silent, the Intangible, the Eternal, the Immutable, is free from the jaws of death" (Katha Up). Spiritual awakening exposing the vanity of worldly goods, changes completely the relation to life and brings everlasting bliss." "Thus in the true Brahman he becomes perfect and renovated. His harvest is detachment from all good. Without desire he attains boundless imperishable felicity, establishing his abode therein" (Maitreya Up). Perfected Yogis attain that transcendence above good and evil which haunted Nietzsche. "He who experiences the felicity of this Brahman, from whom words and thoughts recoil not reaching him; . . . does not worry saying—what good have I left undone? What wrong have I done? Knowing this he attains salvation" (Taittiriya Up). This is a preamble to the parable of Martha and Mary, one of the clearest assertions



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in Christian teachings of the otherworldliness of spiritual reality.

Thus for millennia, the elite of India strove not for the salvation of their personality, but for liberation from the bondage of separate private existence. "Perfectly pure would be the light if there existed nothing to receive it, neither space nor ether nor earth; such is the condition of the witness, of the seer when he is isolated; the condition of pure Atman, when the three worlds, thou and myself and all that is perceived by the senses, have entered unto non-being" (Yogavasishta ).

This sublime ambition gives the higher regions of Hindu mysticism such a subtle atmosphere the one is apt to feel dizzy before its bottomless profundities, yet along the path to the Supreme, where the limiting processes of Cosmic Becoming are transcended to reach the infinitude of Pure Being; are to be found the lovely repositories of the cults of the personified deities. Besides the awesome figures of Shiva and Kali, Vishnu, Krishna and Rama have an endearing beauty and tender love. They can gratify the yearnings of all the ardent devotees who still need a return for their love, while pursuing their journey on the path leading to omnitude in the final salvation from all limitations, both objective and subjective.

### LECTURE III.

## *Buddhist Mysticism*

### *Historical Development of its Metaphysics of Salvation*

WITH THE doctrine of Buddha we come to the religion which has been for centuries that of the greater part of mankind and which to this day with its more or less 700 million nominal devotees, still claims a following almost as large as that of Christianity. It has inspired great civilizations and many outstanding men in all fields of human endeavour. Its complex doctrines constitute one of the main efforts of humanity to interpret the problems of the universe and the riddle of man's destiny.

The survey of Buddhism is at the same time simpler and more extensive than that of Hinduism. A systematic exposition of Hindu mysticism is a baffling undertaking because of the bewildering multiplicity of its schools and sects. Buddhism is somewhat preserved from the confusing complexity of general Hinduism because it revolves around the central figure of its historical founder, Prince Gautama, of the Sakyas. When a religion has spread in as many countries and endured for as many centuries, as Buddhism, it is bound to undergo many modifications and transformations. It has given rise to many different churches and sects, yet the rallying person of the Thatagatha, the "Thus come" saviour, is the strong link binding together all sects and canons in a general, if loose, community. Therefore, in our endeavour to describe the development of the doctrines of Buddhism as an introduction to the understanding of the mystical theologies of its different branches, we must begin with a short outline of the life of the princely Gautama



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Siddartha, of his teachings, of the church he founded and of its posterior development.

Moses, Homer and even Jesus have been held to be mythical figures without historical reality. The same has been advanced about Buddha. Kern considered him as a purely astronomical myth, as the figure of Jesus is sometimes deemed to be. Other authorities, like Senart, while conceding that some traditions concerning the Buddha may actually have sprung from a legendary living personality, yet hold that the traditional figure of Buddha was chiefly allegorical and mythical. Yet, numerous authors such as Rhys Davids, Prischel and Oldenberg incline to attach some measure of historical value to the general Buddhist tradition. Several recent archaeological discoveries have greatly strengthened the historicity of the founder of Buddhism. The actual site of Kapilavastu, his reputed birth-place also held to be mythical, has been located. Moreover, mention has been found of the Sakyas in a newly discovered Nepalese reliquary, so that his clan can no longer be considered as legendary. Also it has been established that the cult of the relics of the Buddha is anterior to the third century B.C., thus near enough to the ascribed date of his life to be considered as a guarantee of authenticity. Yet, as for Jesus, the actual dates of his life are still subject to some degree of speculation. Modern research leads us to place his birth between 562 and 542 B.C. and his death between 482 and 462 B.C.

His father Suddhodana was king of the Aryan tribe of the Sakyas established in a district about 100 miles north of Benares, thus near the sacred river of the Ganga. In striking parallel to the story of Jesus, his birth was acknowledged by wise men as that of a future world saviour, and as the three kings came to do homage to the child at Bethlehem, legend has it that a holy recluse living in the Himalayas, Devala, left his retreat to come to Kapilavastu to salute the saviour of mankind.

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The legendary life of the Lord of Compassion abounds in poetical anecdotes which give it a great charm but which would lead us too far afield, and we must be satisfied with a summary sketch. A seer had told king Suddhodana his son would grow to be either a great conqueror, or if he should be moved by compassion for human suffering, he would forsake the crown in order to become a saviour of the world. Suddhodana wanted his son to become a great king, and prevented him from becoming acquainted with the sufferings of men. The Prince was cut from all contact with the outside world and grew up in the royal palace, in the pomp of an Oriental court surrounded by an immense park where only beautiful, young and healthy people were admitted. Yet one day as he chanced to leave the royal park with his hunting companions, he saw in a few minutes a miserable beggar, a man afflicted with a loathsome disease, an old woman disfigured by age, and a funeral. He had thus a complete revelation of the sad frailty of all joys and of the inescapable law of suffering closely interwoven with the warp and woof of man's life. Of what avail is the crown? What is the value of even the good a benevolent and mighty prince can bring to his subjects? How vain the joys of war-like triumphs and conquests since the victor is very soon to follow his defeated enemy in the grave? And the mightiest monarch is powerless before the Nemesis of his destiny and that of his dear ones. Yet Gautama felt that there must exist some methods of salvation and decided to make a supreme effort to discover them. He vowed to dedicate his life to the liberation of mankind. But instead of sacrificing his bodily life like Jesus, he relinquished all his worldly privileges. When he took the momentous decision He went through a struggle corresponding to the retreat of Jesus in the desert, where our saviour was tempted by the prince of this world. Gautama was torn between his ties to the world, all the things which made life precious, his beloved wife and child, his respected father, the crown and the love of his future subjects for their young prince, and their



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trust in him, and on the other hand, his immense compassion for the tormented millions of the present and of the future.

Gautama made his choice and one night, he stealthily left his beloved ones during their sleep, to don the robe of the wandering ascetic and start on his career as a discoverer of the healing of mankind. The frescoes of the Ajanta caves show him on the threshold of his palace, holding a lotus flower in his hand and lost in a profound inner struggle between his human nature and his divine mission, in what is one of the most beautiful paintings known.

First he went to gurus famed for their wisdom and dedicated himself to the study of their science, but after a few years he came to the conclusion that they had not found the secret of the final liberation. Then he went to the woods to live as a hermit practising the most rigorous asceticism, in the hope of so mortifying his human nature that it would cease to be a veil for the truth he was seeking. But in vain. He nearly died of privations but did not find the key to liberation. After these two unsuccessful attempts to find truth first in the teachings of other men, then in the mortification of his body, he sought to transcend his inner obstacles in a supreme effort of meditation. Legend has it that he finally attained the liberating enlightenment after a meditation which had lasted a whole night at the foot of the Bo tree, at Bodhimanda in the year 2513 of the Kali Yuga.

He had discovered the cause of suffering and its remedies and was ready to teach men the doctrine of salvation. The seeking prince had become an enlightened one "awakened" to the full realization of truth and light, a "Buddha", from "Bodhi" or infinite wisdom. Another name used to describe the Buddha, that of Tathagatha, also gives us an indication as to his character. It means literally "Thus come" the one who fulfilled the law, who achieved a complete conformity with the pattern of perfection, in close resemblance to the self-definition of The Lord in our Christian scriptures. "I

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am that I am". For the Tibetans, Tathagatha means "Him who has pursued his religious career in accordance with the course followed by his divine predecessors" (1).

Happier than Jesus or Mohammed whose predictions lasted respectively only three and thirteen years, the Buddha preached for fifty years, visiting most of the countries of Hindustan and of Northern Deccan. His prediction met with amazing success. His wife and friends were among his first converts. Before his death he saw his messages established in several important kingdoms and his doctrine practised by millions of devoted followers. He had set up his church firmly and hundreds of earnest disciples were ready to carry on his work after his passing. On his death bed, when surrounded by his five hundred close disciples, in a scene which for sublime beauty rivals the death of his contemporary Socrates, he urged his companions to make use of the last moments he was with them to ask him questions to clear up all their doubts regarding the doctrine. His last words are reported to have been "Brothers, all that has been born must perish, therefore strive diligently for liberation. Live ye as those who have the self-as-lamp, Attadipa, the self-as-refuge, Attasarana, who have Dhamma as lamp, Dhamma as refuge, and no other. Whoever now or when I am gone will so live, will become that peak of the immortals, so work without let-up." We shall see later how important this statement is for the correct understanding of the teaching.

The general doctrine of liberation rests on the "Aryani Satyani" "The Four Noble Truths" on the existence of suffering, the cause of suffering, the ending of suffering and on the path leading to the ending of suffering, which the Tathagatha enumerated thus in the "Sutra of the foundation of the Reign of the Law." "Brothers, it is because we do not know and we do not grasp the four truths of salvation that we must follow for such a long time the desolate path of successive rebirths. But once these four noble truths of sal-



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vation are absolutely recognized and understood, the will to live disappears and Samsara, the circle of successive lives, comes to an end.

Such is, brethren, the Sublime Truth of Suffering. Birth is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering. To be separated from loved ones is suffering, to live with unloved ones is suffering; not to obtain one's desires is suffering, to be compelled to suffer what one dislikes is suffering. In short existence as separate beings is suffering.

Such is, brethren, the Sublime Truth of the cause of suffering: it is the will to live, the desire to exist and to enjoy which leads from birth to birth and seeks satisfaction now in one form, now in another one. It is the desire to gratify one's passions, the desire for personal felicity in this world or the next.

Such is, brethren, the Sublime Truth of the Ending of suffering: it is the destruction of the will to live, the desire to exist and to enjoy. They must be discarded, forsaken, abandoned, one must not accept them any more in oneself.

Such is, brethren, the Sublime Truth of the Path Leading to the ending of suffering: in truth it is the sublime eight-fold path which is called: right knowledge, right will, right word, right life, right action, right efforts, right thought, right meditation.

There are two extremes, brothers, which must be avoided by him who is striving towards liberation. The one, the desire to gratify passions and the desire for the joys of the senses which is low, vile, degrading and pernicious and is the path of the children of the world; the other, that of violent mortification, is sad, painful and useless. The intermediary path alone, which the Buddha found, avoids these two extremes, opens the eyes, enlightens the mind and leads to peace, wisdom, light, 'Nirvana.'

The teachings of Buddha have become known as "Dharma", "Dhamma" in Pali, the "Good Law" or "Right Religion". Their minute prescriptions help the disciples to

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conquer the urges and impulses of Tanha, the will to lead a separate, personal incarnate existence. This Tanha is somewhat comparable to the Bergsonian "Élan Vital". If considered as a personified entity, it corresponds to the creative Gods or Demiurges of other religions.

While Tanha is the cause of separate existence, Karma, or the law of actions and their consequent repercussions, is the moulding and determining director of the course of the destinies of creatures. Thus all beings, from the lowest stone to the highest forms of separate consciousness, those of the exalted and divine entities animating planets and suns, owe their origin to the separative and differentiating influence of Tanha. Yet they receive their personal characteristics from the accumulation of the consequences of their past activities. Bearing on the world of objects "given" by sensory experiences, these activities bring man to identify himself with the "locus" of his habitual response to outer stimuli. Thus Karma binds consciousness, which is the essence of man's personality, to the focus of its activity as the bird is attached to the branch by the fowler's glue. And one is not only attached to the results of his actions. Through their intrinsic immersion in the stream of Tanha, active beings also participate in the intimate and essential association of all the emerging manifestations of the Will to Live. This intimate association with, and implication in all other consequences of the creative activities of Tanha constitutes the collective attachment of beings to the wheel of Samsara, the cosmic cycles of lives and deaths.

It is interesting to note how close these views come to those of one of the most modern western thinkers. Professor Whitehead, on this very chair, defined his conception of the creative process as something very similar to the interaction of the creative activity of Tanha issuing in the Karmic differentiations of its vortices, when he said "the substance of Spinoza is for me the one underlying activity of realization individualizing itself in a plurality of modes. Thus

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concrete fact is process. Each event is an individual matter of fact issuing from the individualization of the substrata activity. But individualization does not mean substantial independence." And further, after having showed the similarity of his views with those of Professor Einstein, the learned professor continued in a vein closely reminiscent of the Leibnizian Monadology: "The conception of internal relatedness involves the analysis of the event into two factors, one the underlying substantial activity of individualization, (Tanha), and the other, the complex of aspects ... which are unified by this individualized activity."

Through this binding aspect of activity, the Karma of India, the agent becomes bound and implied in the consequences of his actions. This general relatedness corresponds closely to the Buddhist wheel of Samsara, in which beings caught in the cosmic process are intimately connected with all other individual events. It is further explained by Professor Whitehead that his theory "involves the entire abandonment of the notion that simple location is the primary way in which things are involved in space-time. In a certain sense, everything is everywhere at all times. For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location. Thus every spatio-temporal standpoint mirrors the world". We shall not continue the parallel showing how the differentiation of time and space out of unicity results or accompanies the selective and restrictive process of individualized becoming out of the homogeneous whole. Sufficient is it for the time being to point out the interesting similarity.

While its metaphysical tenets are of an absorbing interest for comparative metaphysics, Buddhism warns its devotees from absorption in interest for the outer world, its nature and becoming. The study of all material and practical sciences is of no avail to the soul craving liberation as they deal only with the consequences of bondage-begetting Karma. But illumination, dispelling all ensnaring illusory perceptions and freeing man from attachment to Maya, the



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world of sensory shadows, can be attained by the practice of the noble eight-fold path. A vital aspect of Buddhism is that Buddha gave the assurance of that possibility by attaining himself, in his human capacity, to this all-liberating illumination. This places the notion of mystical attainment in the very centre of the system.

In order to help men to practice the virtues necessary to illumination, Gautama encouraged the formation of communities dedicated to the study of the good Law and to the practice of the canonic virtues. Monastic life became the outstanding feature of Buddhism, as was to be the case with early Christianity, and it has remained very prominent to this day. Thus the three eminent aspects of Buddhism are: (1) The Promethean personality of the Buddha who brought men the light of salvation. (2) Dharma, the Good Law pointing the way to liberation. (3) The Samgha or Brotherhood of the Bikshus, the monks.

Hence the famous Buddhist profession of faith, corresponding to the Christian Credo, and which has been pronounced by billions of men in the last 24 centuries: "I take for my guide and refuge the Buddha, the Law, and the Brotherhood", "Buddham saranam gachhami, Dhamman saranam gachhami, Samgham saranam gachhami."

The original teachings of the Buddha, collected by his disciples, have been gathered in three separate series, called the three baskets (in which their scrolls were kept), the Tri-pitaka. These are: (1) The Vinaya, the code of rules directing the lives of monks, whether alone or in communities. (2) The Sutras, giving the teachings of Buddha during the fifty years of his predication, from his debut at Benares, to his death. They are very extensive, containing 250 chapters, divided in five Nikayas. (3) The Abidharma, lessons in metaphysics. These Tripitakas are the cornerstone of Buddhist sacred scriptures, corresponding to our Gospels and are accepted by all sects. But in the course of time a truly colossal exegetic literature has been added.

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Shortly after Buddha's death a first council was held near Rajagriha, under the guidance of His favourite disciple, Mahakasyapa, to codify the doctrine and the precepts of the disciples of the Order. With the marvellously retentive memory of the Orientals, the tenets of the faith, as established, were committed to memory and transmitted orally from teachers to disciples. Yet the texts of the Tripitakas are reported to have been dictated by Ananda, a leading disciple of the Master, to the first council and to have been copied on palm leaves. However, oral transmission remained for centuries the chief source of propagation of the doctrine. Hence the name of "Sangiti", concerts, given to the councils where students and monks sang together the sacred texts. Tradition has it that at the first council, the Vinaya was exposed by the disciple Upali and the Dharma by Ananda.

A second council took place a century later at Vaigali, under the rule of King Kala Asoka. All scriptures were then revised and purified of accretions which kept creeping in, due to the diffusion of the doctrine over immense territories.

The third council, the first to be held in historically known circumstances, approximately two centuries after the death of Buddha, took place at about 280 B.C. during the reign of Asoka, the great Buddhist emperor. This sovereign did much for the diffusion of the good law, both by conforming his rule to its tenets and by sending missionaries to all accessible countries, including Greece and China. This council is reported to have revised all the scriptures, purifying them of the alterations introduced by dissenting sects and monks. Also it is held to have been the origin of the great schism which divided Buddhism in two great sections, the Hinayana or small vehicle of Southern Buddhist countries and the Mahayana or Great Vehicle of the Northern lands.

The last great council to be held in India took place approximately on the eve of the Christian era, under the aegis of the great Kushan King, Kanishka, in the neighbourhood

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of the Himalayas, either in the happy valley of Kashmir or in the Northern Punjab, at Jalandhara. At the request of Kanishka, the current texts of the Tripitakas were again corrected and carefully revised. A great innovation was made. While up to that time, the sacred texts had been formulated in the vulgar languages of the regions in which they were preached, this council published a new recension of the scriptures in Sanskrit, the sacred language of Brahmanism. The great poet Asvaghosha was one of the leading figures of that council. Buddhism had then reached the zenith of its influence in India. Although traditional Brahmanism still had many devotees, the Good Law was followed by the great majority of the population living between the Cape Comorin and the Himalayas. Outside of India it was also holding sway in the countries where Indian civilization had spread its influence, from the shores of the Caspian Sea in the West to the Anamitic mountain range of Indo-China in the East, and from Serindia in Central Asia to the islands of Insulindia, Java, Sumatra, Bali, etc. Later it was to spread to the whole of Central Asia, China and Japan; exerting a most profound influence not only on their religious views, but also on their arts, their literatures and their very approach to life.

If Buddhism has been a great vehicle of culture and civilization extending its benign influence as well as the canons of its art to many countries and races, it also owes much to foreign influences. The pure religion of Persia, which was brought to India with the conquests of Cyrus and Darius, is very likely the source of the concept of the luminous Sukhavati Heaven, closely resembling the paradise of Ahura Mazda, while the Persian solar god Mitra seems to have been the origin of Maitreya, the present Bodhisattva or the next Buddha to be incarnated on our earth. But it is possible that the idea of the Solar Deity or Vairochana, "Dainichi", "The Great Sun" in Japan, comes directly from the joint Iranian-Aryan Pantheon of pre-Vedic origin.



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Greek influences coming in the wake of the armies of Alexander are purported to have made a contribution to Buddhism. One of the oldest Buddhist texts, the "Questions of Milinda" relates a metaphysical debate between the holy Bikshu Nagasena and King Menander, ruler over one of the Greek kingdoms established in North Western India by the generals of Alexander. Without providing positive grounds for claims of a definite Greek influence on Buddhist metaphysics, the fact that the Buddhist authors have deemed a king of the "Yavanas", the Ionians, to be a worthy antagonist for their famous saint shows that they held the Western invaders in high esteem. Mr. Lloyd, in the Oxford international congress for the history of religion, pointed to three instances of the use of the term of the Alexandrian school "Abraxas" in Japanese Buddhist texts.

Interesting as these historical influences may be, they are yet of secondary importance in comparison with the outstanding social and spiritual results of the preaching of the Good Law.

Under the gentle influence of the doctrine of the Compassionate One, many of the kingdoms of India reached a marvellous degree of civilization and human unfoldment, the like of which has not been paralleled in that country or for that matter, perhaps not anywhere else in the world. With their usual accuracy Chinese travellers have left us some interesting documents on the high measure of human attainment of the Indian Buddhist civilization. The Chinese wandering monk Fa-Hien whose descriptions of his travels are one of the best sources of information we have on ancient India, enabling us as it were to see India of fifteen centuries ago through his appreciative eyes, wrote about the country of Pataliputra, one of the Buddhist capitals: "The cities and town of this kingdom are large, this nation is rich. They love discussions but are kindly and just in their dealings."

Every year to celebrate Buddha's anniversary they make

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four wheeled wagons, on which they erect five storied structures propped by lances. They are covered with white felt carpets on which are painted images of all the celestial beings, ornate with gold, silver and coloured glass. At the top a roof of embroidered cloth is fastened; at the four corners stand small chapels in each of which is a sitting Buddha with Bodhisattvas standing at his sides. There may be as many as twenty of those wagons all differing as to pomp and importance. On that day the monks and the laity from all over the country come together to sing, perform feats of skill, make music and give flower and perfume offerings. At night-fall lanterns are lighted everywhere and every province rejoices in the same manner. Every one of the prominent citizens of the kingdom have established a charitable hospital. The poor, orphaned and sick come to them; they receive everything they are in need of. Physicians examine their diseases and they are given to eat and drink and all that is necessary to cure them of their ailments. When they are better they leave of their own accord." Five centuries after this truly Franciscan scene, another Chinese traveller confirms this paradisiacal description which leads us to feel that perhaps the highest form of human relations ever reached on our planet was attained in Buddhist India, during the five or six first centuries of our Christian era. The pious pilgrim Hiuan-Tseng, describes thus the kingdom of the great King Harsha, famous for his justice and his high culture. Visiting the kingdom in 642, he writes "The king divides each day in three parts. In the first he dispatched the affairs of the state, in the second he applied himself to meritorious actions, pursuing goodness with indefatigable zeal. Days were too short for his industry. . . . Often he visited his domains in person taking great care to observe living conditions of his subjects. He had no fixed residence. Wherever he stopped he caused a modest hut to be built and lived in it.

Since all administrative rules are inspired by benevolence,

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the affairs of the state are little complicated. The families are not inscribed on a public register, and men are not subjected to forced labour for the king. The produce of the king's private domain are divided in four parts; the first is used to meet the expenditure of the State and provide for the sacrifices on the altars; the second constitutes endowments for the ministers and State councillors; the third is used to recompense men that are outstanding by their talents, their science or their intelligence; the fourth is used for pious foundations and alms to the different sects. This is why taxes are light and rates moderate. Each enjoys in peace the patrimony he received from his ancestors. All cultivate the earth for their sustenance. They borrow seed from the domain of the king and pay in return the sixth part of their crop. Merchants come and go freely for their business. When the king undertakes some public building he does not compel his subjects to work without compensation. He gives them salaries proportionate to their work. Soldiers are recruited according to needs of the service. They are promised rewards and volunteer their services freely. The governors, the ministers, the magistrates and the employees of the state receive each a given quantity of land and live from its produce. Although of a light-hearted nature the inhabitants are remarkable for their straight and honest character. Concerning wealth, they take nothing unduly; concerning justice, they make excessive concessions. They fear the punishment of another life. They do not hold industrial professions in high esteem. They do not indulge in fraud or theft and they confirm their promises by oath. Rectitude is the dominant feature of administration, their customs are easy and gentle."

Alas, this golden era of India was soon to disappear together with the kindly religion which had fostered it. The country was conquered by Moslems. In the religious field a powerful Brahmanist reaction launched by the Shivaïtes in the seventh century progressively drove Buddhism out of



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the land of its birth. At the end of the twelfth century the doctrine of the Good Law had completely ceased to be practised in India, with the exception of Nepal where it survived until the eighteenth century. Today Buddhism is about as foreign to India as it is in Europe.

But if the light of the Law had failed in India, it prospered beyond expectation in other lands. In contradiction to Hinduism, Buddhism was a missionary faith. Already in the third century B.C. the great emperor Asoka had sent missionaries to the Greek sovereigns of Egypt, Syria and Cyrene, as well as to Southern India and Ceylon. As he expressed it in the inscriptions on the numerous pillars he left all over India, he rejoiced more in spiritual conquests than in military victories: "Joy is to be sought in the conquest of the Good Law...His Majesty attaches importance only to the fruits to be reaped in another life. This is why this script of the Good Law has been engraven, so that my sons and my grand-sons, as long as their lineage shall endure, do not believe that they must make new conquests, and also in order that even in the case of conquest by arms, they seek their pleasure in patience and kindness and so that they may consider as the only worthy conquest, the conquest of the Good Law which operates on this world as well as on the next."

All the countries to the West, North-West, South, South-East and East of India were converted to Buddhism between the third and first centuries B.C. After a thousand years of Buddhist civilization in the seventh and eighth centuries, Islam conquered all the Western and North-Western marches of Buddhism, from Iran and Sindh to Sinkiang or Chinese Turkestan. But the Eastern lands were to remain Buddhist to our day. Legend has it that missionaries sent by Asoka reached the court of the Chinese emperor Houang-Ti (242-210 B.C.) This preliminary contact left no historical traces. The first recorded introduction of Buddhism in China, which was to provide another homeland for the doctrines of

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the Good Law, dates from the year two B.C. A Chinese official sent on a mission to the court of the Ta Yuetche, a Mongol tribe settled in Serindia, received from the mouth of their crown prince an oral communication of a Buddhist text which he carefully brought back to the Imperial court. Behind this first bearer of the glad tidings, apostles and missionaries were soon to open a beaten track uniting China to India, passing to the north of savage Tibet and over which, to quote our great Orientalist Sylvain Levi, a whole majestic civilization was to pass, making a most important contribution to Chinese culture.

The first Buddhist settlements in China were established during the reign of Emperor Ming-Ti, from the years 8 to 76 A.D. While the empire of the Good Law in India was for ever receding before the inroads of its Brahmin competitors, it flourished increasingly in China. At first it was admitted on a footing of equality with the official code of ethics of Confucianism and with the indigenous mystical cult of Taoism, but soon it superseded these two rivals and was almost universally accepted by the popular masses. Buddhism was to exercise a deep influence on the development of Chinese art and civilization. Its innumerable treatises were diligently translated. At first the translators were exclusively Serindian scholars, missionaries coming from the ancient Persian settlements of Central Asia who had accepted Buddhism and were in regular trade relations with China along with the famous silk route. Under the emperors Wei, after the conquest of Central Asia by China, about the time when the Roman empire was beginning to totter, the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhara was introduced in China where it exercised a profound influence and produced many masterpieces which made the art of this dynasty particularly famous. The study of the important role played by the various countries of Central Asia, dotted along the silk route, in the political, cultural and spiritual exchanges between the great Asiatic centres of culture in Persia, India and China is most

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interesting and enlightening, but we can do no more here than indicate their part in the spreading of Indian religious representations.

Quite naturally on reaching such vast countries with their immense populations, Buddhism soon underwent great modifications. The Chinese adapted it to their particular needs and to their national genius. As China held such an important place in the Buddhist world, these heterodox tendencies were a matter of concern to the leaders of Buddhism, still residing in India, and in 526 the 28th patriarch of the Buddhist Community, who was also the head of the Dhyana (meditation) school, left India to transfer the seat of the patriarchate to China. The introduction of the Dhyana discipline in China was the origin of the great Zen School of mystical realization. The progress of Buddhism was so great that it evoked the resentment of the local Confucians and Taoists, and its faithful were subjected to numerous persecutions. In the eighth century, twelve thousand monks were banished. In the ninth century, 4600 monasteries were destroyed and 26,000 monks driven out. In 850 many Buddhists were among the 120,000 followers of foreign cults massacred in Canton. In the tenth century Buddhism was forbidden by Imperial order and 3000 temples closed. Yet, it survived all these persecutions and remained to this day the main spiritual influence in the land of Han.

But present-day Chinese Buddhism is very remote from the pure doctrine of Sakyamuni. With their particular genius for adaption and syncretism, the Chinese have evolved a popular religious amalgam in which the figures of the different Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of Mahayanism still hold the most important places but where Taoist saints play quite a fair role while Confucian texts and tablets are also very much in evidence. But besides these popular forms, Chinese Buddhism has produced many great saints and seers who were as superior to these naive expressions as the lives of



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Saint Francis or Saint John of the Cross tower above the superstitions of ignorant Napolitan or Mexican peasants.

Chinese Buddhism is at this time undergoing a period of decadence but it has found refuge in Japan, where owing to that nation's seclusion from the life in the rest of the world until our time, it has preserved its purity and spiritual fervour. Yet, it is only the religion of a minority in the Nipponese empire still controlled by the votaries of the anachronic totemistic Shinto cult. However Japan has rendered us the service of preserving many forms of Buddhism which have more or less disappeared in other countries. In particular the remarkable Zen sect is still flourishing in its monasteries.

One finds in Japan three Buddhist sects tracing their origin through China to the Patriarch Nagarjuna. (1) The Shingon sect which claims its esoteric doctrine to have been inspired not by Sakyamuni but by Vairochana, the greatest of all the Buddhas who came to this earth. (2) The Zen sect, whose abstract psychological metaphysics is strangely akin to the doctrines of Docetism which was flourishing in early Christianity at the time of the introduction of Zen in China. (3) The school of the "Pure land" or "Tendai", offering Amitabha as the centre of its doctrine. Quite a few other sects are to be found in a well preserved condition in the island empire.

Tibet has played a similar part in the preservation of Buddhist doctrines and practices. It is interesting to survey rapidly its religious history for it offers a link in the understanding of the general development of Buddhism, and also, it helps to clarify many misconceptions about this somewhat mysterious country. Repeatedly one comes across claims that some "teacher of wisdom" has discovered in a mysterious Tibetan cave or crypt "the most ancient books in the world" containing precious and secret doctrines, going back to ages unknown to history and which the Lamas have been assiduously preserving for the time when such a qualified

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teacher as the one producing himself, would come forward to enlighten a few elect disciples.

Truth is quite other. The actual fact is that Tibet was a late comer in the fold of civilized countries, particularly in the field of religion. Until the end of the sixth century of our era, it was in a state of low barbarity, on a par with the primitive nomadic tribes of Siberia with which it had much in common, particularly in its religion. Writing was unknown, art and literature were of the crudest and religion was at a very inferior level. It was the Bon cult, akin to the cruel and coarse cult of the Siberian Shamans, a sort of naturist magic and sorcery including bloody and even human sacrifices. Later on, in the course of its relations with Buddhism, the Bon cult borrowed much from its competitor, and also from Hindu philosophy and metaphysics, and developed a more elaborate theology. Yet there is no doubt that originally it was devoid of any of the attributes of a spiritual and pure religion capable of being a fount of precious wisdom. In the period previous to the introduction of Buddhism, it produced no text or monument worthy of even oral record. In fact Tibetan prehistorical civilization was so low that it was as an island of ignorant savagery, isolated by its mountainous fastness from the surrounding highly civilized and cultured regions of India and Serindia. This inferior development is proven by the fact that while in India such remarkable religious texts as the Vedas were composed in very remote times and handed down orally until the Arya had learned the art of writing from the west, Tibetan literature is extremely poor in texts anterior to the introduction of writing, and this only took place during the reign of King Srong Tsen Gam-Po, between 630 and 663, thus well in our era and even after Mohammed had written the Koran. And whatever texts are recorded as coming from pre-Buddhist oral traditions are of mediocre literary merit and of no religious interest.

The first ruler to bring civilization in Tibet was Nam-Ri



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Srong Btsam, who died in 629 after having introduced arithmetic and medicine from China. His son Srong Tsen Gam-Po, was a great warrior and united under his rule practically the whole of present day Tibet, which up to that date was divided between warring savage tribes. After having waged war against the Chinese and the Indians, he married two princesses, daughters of his former enemies, one Chinese and the other from Nepal. Both were Buddhists, and under their influence the King caused Buddhism to be introduced in Tibet. Srong Tsen Gam-Po sent his minister Thu Mi Sam Bota to India to acquire some sacred Buddhist Texts, and this one also brought back an alphabet based on that of Kashmir. Thus the introduction of writing in Tibet does not go back further than the end of the seventh century, and consequently there can be no Tibetan book discovered which could be older than that date. Moreover for centuries after, the whole of Tibetan literary activity consisted in translating the Buddhist texts introduced in the country by Indian missionaries or brought back from India by the emissaries sent by pious Tibetan rulers in order to increase the knowledge of the Good Law in their empire. In 747 a famous saint and teacher, Padma Sambava, who was teaching in Udyana in N. W. India was invited by King Hri-Song Ide-Btsam to come to Tibet to teach his doctrine which however was tainted with magical practice and Brahmanist ritual. Padma Sambava occupies an important position in the religious history of Tibet. He was the founder of the first order of Buddhist monks in the country, the red cap Lamas, the Dug-Pas. Thus the order of the Lamas was first founded in the middle of the eighth century by an Indian teacher who gave it a doctrine made up of a mixture of Mahayana Buddhism with Indian Tantrism.

One of the most famous kingly supporters of Buddhism was Ral Pa Chan who died in 821. He caused the translation of all the principal Buddhist texts in Tibetan, thus originating the two great collections of sacred texts, the



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Tandjur and the Kandjur, whose hundreds of volumes remain to this day the "corpus" of Tibetan sacred literature. He was murdered by his brother Lang Darma, a Tibetan Julian, fiercely devoted to the Bon cult and who undertook to destroy Buddhism and restore the sinister practices of bygone ages. His reign was marked by sanguinary excesses. An old chronicle says that under his rule "Religious law snapped like a decayed rope; the peace of Tibet became like a lamp without oil. Evil blew like a storm and good intentions were forgotten like a dream." After having massacred innumerable Buddhist monks, Lang Darma was himself murdered by a monk, in 842. His crimes had brought to an end the great period of Tibetan civilization which had begun two centuries before, around 630.

From 842 to 1260 Tibet, divided in many small feudal states, reverted to a semi-anarchic condition but Buddhism survived. In 1013, the Pandit Dharmapala came from India with a group of disciples and brought new lustre to religious studies. In 1042 arrived the Patriarch Atisa of Magada who was to have even greater influence. Leaving his Indian monastery at Vikramasila, at the invitation of a local prince, he spent fourteen years in Tibet teaching, translating and writing many books based chiefly on the doctrines of the Madhyamika school of the Mahayana. This school of the Golden Mean, laid particular emphasis on the evanescent character of all beings and subjects. Since a being is, at any given time, only capable of the activity it then displays, it did not exist in the past, nor is it existing in the future. If it were capable of the activity it displayed in the past or of the activity to be displayed in the future, that being should at any given moment display the totality of its past, present and future activities. Thus the being of any object is a purely instantaneous process and all "events" to use the expression of Whitehead, do not endure. Therefore our representations of objects and persons are arbitrary and

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based on illusions. The world as we know it, is void of reality.

This is the famous doctrine of the "Sunyata" the void considered as the basis of reality, which was to play such an important part in the metaphysics of Tibet, and consequently of its mystical theology. Without entering in a study of this fascinating system let us note that this cornerstone of Tibetan doctrine comes from India where it had been taught for many centuries. The Majjhima Nikaya, giving the Pali canon said "Freeing the attention from all differentiating characters, reach in oneself to vacuity" (III 3). Buddhaghosha also expounded it in his writings. We find here a typical instance of an oft repeated process according to which doctrines which are supposed to be original and to constitute the message of a particular religion or church were really received from anterior sources. Of course this does not detract from the interest of the doctrine of the Sunyata; perhaps if anything, it adds to its historical connotation, but it certainly reduces the validity of the claims to extraordinary importance and originality made on behalf of Tibetan sacred lore by some of its votaries.

The influence of Buddhism on the public life of Tibet waxed steadily stronger until 1260, when the great Mongol emperor, Kublai Khan, whose immense empire stretched from Korea, Manchuria and Eastern Siberia to the borders of Poland, established the temporal authority of the Lamas over Tibet. He placed the government in the hands of the superior of the Sakya Monastery in the vicinity of Shigatse. Hence the establishment of the Lama rule only came two centuries after the Norman conquest of England. A century later, a great reformer, Tson Ka Pa, undertook to purify the teachings and the life of the Lamas which had become very corrupt morally while their tenets were tainted by low magic and superstition. He founded the new order of the Gelug Pas, restoring a strict observance of the virtues prescribed by the Vinaya to the monks of the Sangha. His

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successor, Ganden Truppa, founded around 1470 the Great monastery of Tashi Lumpo, which became the seat of the Tashi Lama. Ganden Truppa was supposed to have reincarnated himself in the body of a child born two years after his death. This was the beginning of the supposed reincarnations of the Dalai Lama, who is reputed to have occupied 70 bodies to this day.

The first European reported to have reached Tibet in historical times was Brother Odoric de Pordenone, said to have reached Lhasa in 1328. But the data concerning his journey are more than scanty. On the contrary it seems quite probable that the Portuguese Jesuit Father Antonio de Andrada, entered Tibet by the western route in 1620. In 1661 two other Jesuits, Orville and Greber, went to Lhasa, bringing back a good drawing of the Potala, the palace of the Dalai Lama which was published in Amsterdam in 1667 (*China Illustrata*). In 1715 several Capuchin monks went from Calcutta to Lhasa where they established a mission which lasted until 1745, when it was closed owing to lack of funds. This little known fact of the existence of a Catholic mission in Lhasa for thirty years in the eighteenth century is most interesting. It throws a great deal of light on the apparently mysterious problem of the extreme resemblance between the religious services of the Lamas and the Holy Mass of the Catholics, a resemblance which deeply struck the present speaker when he first participated in the services of the Lama temples he visited in Western Tibet. Not only had the officiating Lama two acolytes, but at the beginning of the office they purified the temple by aspersions of blessed water, the acolytes accentuating their prayers by ringing little bells at frequent interludes, the congregation partaking of holy communion under the two aspects of bread and tea. This similarity has perplexed many authors. Yet knowing the great hospitality of most Eastern Buddhists, for other cultural and religious forms, a hospitality demonstrated by the introduction of Taoist and



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Confucian statues and scriptures in Buddhist temples, it is very possible, not to say probable, that the Lamas who, during thirty years had frequent opportunities of witnessing Catholic services in Lhasa itself, were brought quite naturally to borrow some of the striking outer forms of the Roman ritual.

With this example of syncretism, we conclude our very summary outline of the general history of the vast array of the traditions of Buddhism. While it may help to reduce excessive claims to their proper value, by contrasting facts with legend; its purpose is to help us to sense the intellectual and emotional atmosphere in which Buddhist mystics are living and which provides them with the forms and vocabulary with which they try to give an account of their experience of that which can neither be seen, nor touched, nor heard and yet conveys the enlightenment which lifts consciousness above the limiting entanglements of the world of evanescent appearances. With its doctrine associating life with suffering and affirming the radical vacuity of the world of experience, Buddhism is often held to be a nihilist faith leading to a sort of dizzy pessimism urging its votaries to self-destroying introspection, in lofty indifference to the outer unfoldments of the cosmic process. The little we have seen of its history and spread should give us quite another picture. Not only has Buddhism been compatible with fine civilizations displaying a high quality of human relationships in the past, but to this day, it is not possible to visit a Buddhist monastery, be it in Tibet or in Ceylon, in Birmah or in Korea, without being struck with its atmosphere of serene peace and light-hearted joy, a joy of a quality closely resembling that which we usually associate in the West with the figure of St. Francis.

Without concluding that similar effects are to be ascribed to similar causes, we note that that peace and joy seem to be the offspring of the secure faith which results from a measure of experience of the great reality in the apical cen-

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tre of human consciousness. In our next meeting we shall attempt to give a short and somewhat composite account of the doctrines of the various Buddhist schools of mystical theology and their bearing on the quest of liberating enlightenment.



Indra's (Sanskrit: Nāgārjuna)  
Centre for the Art

## LECTURE IV

### *Buddhist Mysticism*

#### *The Quest for Enlightenment*

SINCE BUDDHIST texts constitute the most voluminous of all religious literature, it is impossible for us to indulge even in a superficial examination of their many treatises and innumerable commentaries. We shall have to restrict ourselves to a summary of the general attitude of Buddhism towards the different aspects of the mystical quest.

One might sum up the whole theoretical and practical message of Buddhism in saying that it is a theory of salvation, based on practical renunciation of the worldly appetites binding the soul to suffering-producing illusions. That practical detachment is to be secured by the discipline of meditation which leads to a spiritual enlightenment allowing man to see the world of appearances under its true light and thus deprive it of all attraction. Consequently, it is evident that mysticism, the quest of a reality transcending outer appearances, is closely interwoven in the whole pattern of Buddhism.

As a preliminary introduction of our survey of its mystical doctrines we must bear in mind a very important fact. Although Buddhism rose in sharp reaction against the Brahmanical practice of religion, its whole system of metaphysics is based on the fundamental notions of Hinduism. Two of these would be acknowledged by all modern Buddhists, namely the doctrine of numerous successive rebirths and the law of casualty of action, binding man to the wheel of Samsara, of successive incarnations, in accordance with the causes he sets in motion by the way he chooses his reactions to outer occurrences.



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But if all Buddhists agree on these two basic Hindu teachings they sharply disagree on the two essential notions of the existence of God and of man's spiritual nature. While the various schools of the Mahayana profess on these two aspects of the spiritual reality, views that are more or less akin to the traditional Hindu metaphysics, the followers of the Hinayana on the contrary do not hold any belief in the existence of a Supreme Spiritual Reality as a voluntary cause and substance of the Universe nor in the existence in man of a transcendent spiritual principle. They even assert that the human personality has no permanent basis of reality, no soul, no personalized spiritual essence or principle of individuality. They believe man to be a mere aggregate of habits of reactions to outer events, clustering around a vortex of Tanha, the Universal Will to Be. This fortuitously aggregated entity, constituted entirely by chance components, "happening in" on it from the outside, and held together only by the accumulating life force resulting from the performance of action and confirmed by their reactions, can never achieve any of the exalted ambitions it is capable of conceiving. It is doomed to misery because all the aspirations of the aggregated centres of consciousness towards a full, infinite and perfect life are beyond the reach of these evanescent flickers of time caught in the web of space.

Therefore the only intelligent course for the consciousness which has grasped this sinister truth about the real nature of human beings and life, is to paralyze the promptings of Tanha by detachment from all objects of desire. The satisfaction of desires and appetites only strengthens them and develops them further, with the result that the collection of aggregates constituting man are ever more strongly tied to the cycle of rebirth and limitations whose very nature is bound to be a permanent cause of suffering while any chance happiness could be but a fleeting and ultimately disappointing interlude. By refusing to breed any form of desire for transitory objects, by cultivating detachment towards

all death-subjected persons and things, the aggregates are weaned from their ailments and soon disintegrate, putting an end to worldly suffering and frustration centering round its cluster.

Judged from the standpoint of human personality this purported Buddhist doctrine of the non-existence of God and of the soul, seems cold and dreary. Its nihilism is disconcerting and somewhat repellent. No wonder that this strange religious doctrine in which God plays no part and man is denied any personal reality has been described "as barely hanging on the fringes of the world religions and being scarcely more than a system of ethics". (Quoted by Mrs. Rhys Davids : The original gospel of Buddha, p. 13).

If this were the whole of Buddhism it would be indeed extraordinary that such a God-forsaking doctrine should have produced so many magnificent civilizations and some of the most humane and compassionate nations. It would seem incredible that such a negative doctrine should have produced such constructively good results. But there is really no cause for wonderment in the superb results of the teachings of the Sakya Muni. We are now in a position to appreciate the historical reality back of the claims of some of the modern schools of Buddhism. We are better acquainted with the early Buddhist texts, and we have reached a more correct understanding of the meaning of the complicated terms which were baffling former students of Orientalism. In particular the increased knowledge of Hinduism which we have obtained has been of considerable help in elucidating the obscure aspects of Pali texts. This has brought present day students to realize that there is very little relationship between the modern Hinayana teachings and the original Buddhist doctrine.

It has become evident that Hinayanism, far from being the most faithful representative of the early teachings, as it claims to be, is on the contrary an entirely new version and quite a perverted travesty of the tenets of Gautama. It is

true that most of the present leaders of the Southern Buddhist communities cling to the doctrine of "Anatma", the non-existence of the soul. I well remember how, for many lengthy sessions I discussed this point with the venerable abbot of the School of the monks of the Yellow Robe in Bangkok and how he would contradict all my efforts to conciliate his tenets on the non-reality of the human personality with the existence in and through man of an impersonal, eternal and transcendent essence, corresponding to the Paramatma of Hinduism, the peak of the soul of Christian mystics, the infinitely transcendent, subtle and inactive summit of the threefold spiritual entity manifesting through the soul animating human personality. He would shake his head and repeat again and again, "There is no soul, nothing permanent in men's make up". The same attitude prevailed among the Shingalese monks of Kandy who like their Siamese brethren, looked upon the Mahayanists as sorry traducers of the true doctrine.

Thus it is not surprising that some western students of Buddhism should have accepted this view and should have been prompted to "read" it into their interpretation of some of the difficult ancient Pali texts. It was easy for them to read in the old scriptures the ideas professed by modern Hinayanists. Yet while it is true that our modern methods of research work have enabled us to throw considerable clarity on many of the problems of the cultural developments of the east, it is an imperious necessity for the westerner to beware of the easy acceptance of hasty conclusions in realms of thought so unfamiliar to us, even when they are endorsed by some of the devotees of these doctrines.

A better understanding of Pali metaphysical terminology, resulting from a greater familiarity with Hindu and Buddhist metaphysics, now enables us to perceive that many orientalists have been parties to one of the most amazing errors and travesties of facts in the history of religious research.



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Far from denying or even ignoring the existence of God, the early renderings of the teachings of the Buddha are constantly alluding not only to the part played by Brahma in ruling over the created universe of forms, which after all could be consistent with some measure of materialistic evolution, but they also lay stress on Atma, or Atta in Pali the divine spiritual supracosmic reality. But, as Mrs. Rhys Davids, the widow and collaborator of the founder of the Pali Texts Society, after having committed the same error, had the admirable courage to point out herself, most occidental scholars at first translated all mentions of Atta by self as pertaining to human personality instead of the Cosmic Self, the reality present in all separate appearances. Thus a statement of the necessity for man to rely on the presence of the Infinite Spiritual Reality was construed to mean that man had to be entirely self-reliant in his hopes of salvation. The last admonition of Buddha to his followers "Live ye as those who have Atta as lamp, Atta as refuge, who have Dhamma as lamp, Dhamma as refuge, and no other" meant not that man was to attain liberation by following the Good Law through the utmost dedication of all his personal powers, but by following the Law in a complete surrender to the spiritual Reality. Thus instead of the sombre pride of Pelagianism, claiming that man can reach salvation by his sole exertions, we have the resort to transcendent help, almost as in the Christian reliance on grace. In fact the evidence in favour of an early Buddhist belief in the possibility for man to be helped by a transcendent Divine Reality is so strong that Mrs. Rhys Davids, after having pointed to a similar conception in Upanishadic texts, goes so far as to state "To claim that either teaching showed him (man) to be saved in any real sense without the co-operation of a Greater, a More-than-he, even that Most in Whom he has faith, is to leave one's book with a lie." (p. 39).

As we get to know better the history of the evolution of Buddhism, we realize that the undeniable "acosmism" and non-spiritual belief of modern Hinayanists, are posterior

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developments which crept up after the founder's death and caused among his followers the unrest which rendered necessary the many councils and their successive editions of the doctrine. The clearer the understanding, we reach of the most subtle aspects of Buddhism and the more we realize that far from being a sorry and soulless anomaly in the religious field, it is on the contrary a most spiritual doctrine.

Its only crime which is really a virtue, is to have laid particular emphasis on the transitory and unreal character of all separate organizations and appearances, including in these not only all material and visible bodies, but also the subtle psychological vehicles of imagination and ensuing passions of the worldly man, the son of nature, and even the lofty and God-like personalized agents of creation, the planetary angels or Gods animating clusters of vast agglomerations of solar systems in the infinite expanse of the stellar universe, whose role is similar to that of the Demiurges and Cosmocratores of the Greeks or to the Jewish Elohim.

This uncompromising loyalty to absolute spiritualism, this sharp realization of the basically unreal nature of all that happens in time and takes place in space, has given rise to the highest teaching of the Buddhist metaphysics: *Sūnyata*, the famous doctrine of the void considered as the ultimate reality, and which is after all nothing but the ultimate consequence of the truth on which rests the negative Theology of the Christians. The fact that it affirms only the illusory character of any form, however subtle, but recognizes a transcendent spiritual reality is indicated by its injunction upon disciples to meditate on "the fullness of the void." In the light of the mystical experience as expressed in the works of the great seers of all faiths, this clearly implies a sublime transcendent reality whose infinite subtlety is towering high above any materializing pantheistic representation.

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The attuning with this sublime reality, beyond all limiting fetters, even those of the subtle vehicles of focalised consciousness and definite existence, is that which is reached in Nirvana, which must be understood as above being and not as deprived of it. This high doctrine must be considered from the point of view of the concept of the transcendent, non-manifesting aspect of God to which some Western theologians, like the pseudo Dionysius, St. Bonaventura, and Eckhart alluded when they held that the Godhead, or supreme deity, became God through the self limiting act of creation. Nirvana does not mean non-existent, its etymology might be construed as meaning void of vehicles or way of expression. That this doctrine does not teach the destruction of man but his release from all fettering bonds, a release which still leaves him in a position to revert to the assumption of vehicles of manifestation on the world of limitation, as in the case with Buddha, is attested by no less an authority than Aurobindo Ghose, one of the greatest living exponents of Eastern metaphysics. "We are accustomed to regard Nirvana and any kind of existence and action in the world as incompatible. But, if we look closely at Buddhism we shall doubt whether the absolute incompatibility really existed even for the Buddhists." (Essays on the Gita. I p. 344).

Thus there seems to be no doubt that, in conformity to the original teachings of the Buddha, some of the early Hinayana doctors taught such transcendent doctrines that some of their more formally-minded students and translators failed to grasp them and interpreted them in a nihilistic way. This spiritual failure, probably fostered and reinforced by the intellectualizing doctrines and spirit of the contemporary Sankhya school and also by the influence of the wide-spread materialistic school of the Atomists, was to give rise to the cold and desperate theories of the most narrow representatives of the soulless Southern sects. Their attitude towards the world is that of an all-embracing re-



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jection. In regard to personal life they advocate a suicidal self-annihilation.

Northern Buddhism, Mahayana, on the contrary has taken a more human and a more relative attitude. Hinayana aimed at leading men to personal liberation. The goal assigned to its followers is to become Arhats, liberated from all bondage and ready to enter Nirvāna leaving the world forever. On the contrary, Mahayana has been called the *Boddhisattvayana*, the vehicle of the *Boddhisattvas* leading its followers to strive to become saviours of mankind. For Hinayanists, Buddha was not a Saviour but a Master teaching the way to liberation. This attitude is very much in accordance with the thesis of Brahmanism, that every man must work out his own salvation exclusively through his personal efforts. On the contrary the theistic sects, particularly the adorators of Vishnu, notably under the form of his Krishna avatar, hold that man may be led to salvation by the operations of the redeeming grace of a saviour.

Between these two opposite views, Mahayana Buddhism can be said to achieve a working synthesis. Already in 300 B.C. the sect *Mahasāṅghika*, precursor of the Mahayana, held that Buddha was the reincarnation of a Divine Being, far transcending ordinary human teachers. This view attributing even several previous divine incarnations to the Buddha, is similar to the Vaisnavite avatars conception. Very soon, Mahayanism accentuating its "rapprochement" with current Indian religious forms, described a whole pantheon mediating between mankind and Atma. Some schools, particularly the *Gelūpas* of Tibet and the *Nichiren* of Japan, went so far as to describe a Supreme head of the spiritual hierarchy, *Adi-Buddha*, creator and essence of the whole universe. Under this creator corresponding closely to *Parabrahma* of classical Hinduism, Northern Buddhism describes five distinct Buddhas, each with his successive incarnations. The relations of these Divine Buddhas to the transcendent creator "*Adi-Buddha*" closely approximate to those of the

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Hindu gods Vishnu and Shiva in their different avatars with the manifesting deity Ishvara.

These five manifesting Buddhas functioned successively on three different planes on their way down from immediate proximity to the divine effulgence of Adi-Buddha to actual incarnation in a human form. Under their exalted aspect, these five manifesting Buddhas are known as Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amoghasiddha and Amitabha, this last one being the paradigm of our historical Buddha, Gautama the Sage of the Sakya. Each of these five Buddhas assumes three aspects or persons, corresponding to the three planes on which they function on their way from the exalted glory of what might be called the archetypal Buddhic essence to the lowly plane of concrete limited incarnation.

The five Paradigmatic Buddhas next to Adi-Buddha are known as the Dhyani Buddhas. By a first limiting self-concretisation they engender a Bodhisattva, or glorious being who from the plane of causality presides over the gathering of the conditions necessary for the incarnation of a Buddha upon the earth. When all the required terrestrial historical conditions are at hand, the Bodhisattva assumes a human body and in the course of his life becomes a saviour of mankind. Thus Amitabha, when he directed his creative energies towards an incarnation in the human form became first the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara, the compassionate one, whose infinite benevolence is symbolized in his statues by a thousand arms whose open hands are pouring his blessings upon the world. In the course of time Avalokiteshwara left the causal plane to incarnate on the earth as the Sakya Muni. In the fifteenth chapter of the Lotus, Buddha says that when the world degenerates and falls a prey to vice and injustice, he comes back upon the earth in order to restore the rule of the Good Law. Of course this is closely akin to the promises of Jewish Messiahism, of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita and to the theory of the Imams among



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the Moslems. It might be even held to be somewhat similar to the Christian promise that Christ will return to put an end to the reign of the Antechrist.

Thus the stage was set for the development of mysticism among the followers of the Tathagatha, with the idea of an all-pervading creative essence personified in the figure of Adi-Buddha, the most exalted aspect of Atma, the Hindu Atma, and with the continuity of essential beings through the process of incarnations. The final great incentive was given by the teaching that the illumination of subliminal consciousness attained by the Buddha and which allowed Him to merge His nature with the pure light of the One Reality is accessible to all men. Like the miracle of Good Friday for the Knights of the Holy Grail to whom it announced the opening of a channel for grace between Heaven and Earth, the illumination of the man Gautama and his access to perfected Buddhahood, brought to all men the glad tidings that the way to infinite freedom lay in their most intimate essence.

For the practically-minded Chinese, and for other Eastern Asiatics among whom are to be found to this day the majorities of the Mahayanists, this possibility for all men to obtain liberating illumination became the most important aspect of Buddhism. It transformed it from a doctrine that one had to accept on faith into a demonstrable technique. Quite naturally it made of Mahayana Buddhism a most fertile soil for the growth of Mysticism.

Unfortunately for those who would have descriptions of the indescribable and who somehow hope they might taste the felicities of mystical union by proxy, Buddhist mystics have left little description of the actual inner processes of consciousness during their illuminations. Yet they can throw much light on mystical psychology. A considerable number of monks attained some form of illumination, and could compare their experiences with that of their fellow wayfarers on the mystic way. These comparisons led to minute-



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ly analytical classifications of the different steps leading to various degrees of mystic consciousness and of the different cosmic modalities corresponding to these degrees of consciousness. Amplifying the psychology of the Hindus, the Buddhist study of consciousness is probably the most extensive school of psychology in the history of mankind. Like the Hindus, Buddhist psychologists hold that different degrees of consciousness correspond to and are caused by evolutionary differences in the organisation of the aspects of the Cosmic process to which they are related and which provide both the objects and modalities of their perceptions. They do not conceive of a mode of consciousness separate from an objective modification of the universe which give rise to it. Of course, that objective universe also includes not only represented ideas but also their own feelings and moods.

This is a most important point of their mystical psychology. The human mind can only create ideas, mental forms, formulas and representations. But this creative capacity is strictly limited to dealing with the illusory world of objects perceptible to the senses, and also with their properties and relations, as these are abstracted and generalized from concrete experience. Any higher form of consciousness is not created by the subject, nor infused from the outside as a direct result from a gift of grace, but is the result of a subtilization of the vehicles of consciousness which allows them to soar above their previous ceiling and synchronize or rather sympathize in the etymological sense, with higher, more subtle and less personalized, and thus more universal phases of the cosmic process. Consequently, there is a close connection between the Mystical psychology of the Buddhist and their metaphysical Cosmology.

Originally Buddhism was primarily the religion of the Monks, the dedicated elite of the Sangha, the Brotherhood. In the course of its development it became also a religion adapted to the needs of the lay followers, the Upasikas. In-

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stead of seeking outright to reach Nirvana immediately by the complete dissolution of all the elements of their life as personified entities, most of the Upasikas rested satisfied with the pursuit of felicity in Swarga. This is the temporary paradise between incarnations. The blissful delights experienced therein depend on the merits accumulated during each life. These merits accrue from the observance of the Good Law of moral conduct, from the worship of divine perfection as manifested in the Buddha, and from the practice of deeds of mercy and compassion.

We cannot enter into the details of all the numerous mystical schools of Buddhism. Some, like Lamaism or Zen, would require volumes. We have to restrict ourselves to a general outline of the most widely recognised aspects of moral discipline, meditation, practice and description of the mystical steps and of the transcendent aspects of the world which give rise to them.

The most general rules, which must be practised by all Upasikas are the Pancha Silas, the five commandments, forbidding (1) the killing of any animate being; (2) any form of theft, including taking undue advantage of others in transactions; (3) illicit sexual intercourse; (4) any form of lying; (5) the use of intoxicating drinks.

The monks supplement the Panchasila with five more commandments constituting the Dasasila, ten commands. These are (6) not to partake of solid food after noon; (7) not to attend evening parties or frivolous show; (8) not to wear any jewels or costly garments; (9) not to sleep on a high, soft bed; (10) not to receive, own or touch any gold or silver coins or objects. With these five additional rules, the members of the Sangha follow a discipline implying vows of chastity, frugality, humility and poverty closely paralleling the vows of Christian monks. Moreover, all Buddhists, but particularly the members of the Sangha, should strive to practise diligently the six Paramitas corresponding to the Christian Theological virtues. These Para-

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mitas are : (1) Loving charity and compassion for all beings. (2) Morality, or the perfect observance of all duties to others, in reverence and consideration. (3) Sweet patience, accepting all trials serenely. (4) The pursuit of true knowledge and understanding. (5) Courage and dauntless energy in the pursuit of duty. (6) Good-will and right purpose in all undertakings.

In order to attain the liberation ensuing upon illumination, the soul must free itself from the four poisons which are intoxicating it and blurring its vision: Kama, sensuality; Bhava, ambitions; Drishti, erroneous belief and Avidya, ignorance.

The way to liberation from the four poisons is double. It consists of Sila, the active practice of virtue and Dhyana, meditation and control of the mind. One of the originators of the Zen school, the great Bodhi-dharma, thus describes the way to illumination "There are many ways to enter the path but after all, they are of two kinds only. One is "Entering by reason" and the other is "Entering by conduct." Entering by reason is understanding of Buddhism through scriptural teachings. Thus we arrive at a deep faith in the real nature which is One and the Same in all beings. The reason why it is not manifest, is due to its deep enfoldment by exterior objects and erroneous thought. When a being abandoning error and embracing truth in the simplicity of his heart stays in the Pi Kuan (direct vision of pure and abstract unity), he finds that there exists neither subject nor object, that the rabble and the dignitaries are of the same essence and he holds firmly to that opinion, without ever deviating from it. Then he will no longer be guided by any literal instruction because he is in silent communion with the principle itself, free from conceptual grasping, for it is serene and inactive. This is called Entering by reason.

One describes as Entering by conduct, the four acts in which all others are included. What are these four: (1) Ending hatred. (2) Obedience to Karma. (3) To seek no-



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thing. (4) To be at one with Dharma (Divine will, or cosmic law, considered as providing the norm of human duty, according to one's status in evolution). In Dharma (complete identification with the Law) there are no separate existences, no similar beings, no Self no other" (One recognizes here the Jivan mukti condition of the perfected Karma Yogi).

The followers of "Christian science" will remark the passage where allusion is made to the "silent communion with principle itself", when the mind has been freed from conceptual grasping which closely resembles their "error of mortal mind." Above all, Christians at large will not fail to perceive the parallel between "the four acts" and the salient rules of conduct embodied in the lord's prayer. (1) Ending hatred . . . Forgiveness of trespass. (2) Acceptance of Karma . . . "Thy will be done." (3) To seek nothing, "do not lead us into temptation." (4) To be at one with Dharma "deliver us from evil". Thus we have a magnificent union in the theory and practice of the mystic path from the most eastern school of Buddhism to Western Christianity.

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The Dhyana of Buddhism, Dzyan in Tibet, Ch'an in China and Zen in Japan, corresponds closely to the "Via mystica" of Christianity. It begins by a simple discipline of the mind and control of the emotions corresponding to the Via purgativa. It further leads to states of felicity and universal enlightenment which are a replica of the Via Illuminativa. Finally it ends in a sublime union with the undescrivable glory of the Supreme, which the Buddhists usually allude to as being "the fullness of the void". The practice of Dhyana is universal among all orders of Buddhist monks and plays a very large part in the doctrines. It is the fourth factor of the five forces, bala; and of the five Indriyas. It is the sixth of the seven constituents of Bodhi, or Bodhiyanga. It is the eighth term of the noble eight-fold path. It plays an important part, even in the austere atmos-

phere of Hinayana. In their method for the control of illusion, its classics describe four degrees of Dhyana.

*1st Dhyana.* Complete concentration on chosen objects, accompanied by tranquil serenity due to detachment from earthly illusion and turmoil which are shut out from consciousness. The mind is still active, fixed on the object of meditation.

*2nd Dhyana.* The analytical examination of the object of meditation ceases, to be replaced by intuitive contemplation thus bringing the mind to complete peace by cessation of its activities. This intensifies the previous serenity into a state of deep joy which saturates the whole being.

*3rd Dhyana.* Objectivity is transcended, objects disappear, a state of absolute patience is attained in which man is utterly indifferent to all emotions of pleasure or displeasure. Thus, free even from the effects of joy, the mind reaches freedom from all passion and desire.

*4th Dhyana.* This leads to a state where both consciousness of the present and memory of the past are completely immune from any passion or affection and final tranquil serenity is achieved.

Each of the first three Dhyanas is divided in three degrees which have to be mastered successively. In the first degree, Paritta, the desired condition is conceived and striven for, but cannot be preserved for any length of time, corresponding to the "Video meliora proboque, sed deteriora sequor" of the Latins. In the medium condition Majihima, the objective has been reached and is fully experienced but cannot be retained permanently, the disciple being subject to lapses. In the final degree, Panita, the disciple, in complete control, is firmly established in the full possession of the newly acquired progress.

The fourth stage of Dhyana, being purely transcendent and above relative aspects is not subdivided in three degrees.

The Buddhist tradition like that of Hinduism and ancient Persia teaches that there are many heavens, corresponding

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to ever more purified, subtle and extensive degrees of consciousness. Even Hinayana describes a series of heavenly planes paralleling the degrees of Dhyana.

	Brahmaparinaja Devaloka	)	Thus
<i>Corresponding to</i>	Brahmapurohita Devaloka	)	six heavens
<i>1st Dhyana.</i>	Mahabrahma Devaloka	)	of form
	Parittabha Devaloka	)	or
<i>Corresponding to</i>	Appamanaba Devaloka	)	Rupa Loka.
<i>2nd Dhyana</i>	Abhassara Devaloka	)	
	Parittaba Subha	)	Three
<i>Corresponding to</i>	Apamana Subha	)	formless
<i>3rd Dhyana.</i>	Subha Kinna	)	heavens.

The tenth heaven corresponding to the fourth Dhyana is subdivided in seven divisions, thus giving sixteen heavens in all.

	Vihapphala
	Asarin asatta
	Aviha asatta
<i>4th Dhyana.</i>	Atappa asatta
	Sudassa asatta
	Sudasei asatta
	Akanittha asatta

Dhyana in its many degrees is abundantly described in different sects with details varying according to their particular views.

Thus Tibetan Mahayanism which inherited the analytical intellectualism of Hindu metaphysics gives a very elaborate description of Dhyana corresponding to the divisions of its cosmology. A survey of this structure of the universe along which the soul has to evolve, provides an introduction to the details of the Tibetan theory of man's relation to the world.

According to man's merit or demerit, he may after his death have to stay in some of the purgatories or Hells and in some of the numerous heavens. Avichi, the Hells or Halls of Purgatory, is said to be composed of seven planes of heat



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and of eight planes of cold. In the fifteen Halls constituting the nether world, souls are tried by limitations corresponding to the nature of the erroneous states of mind which caused them to gravitate to those levels.

Above the fifteen hells of Mahayana, we find 27 successive Heavens divided in three great classes (1) Heavens of the world of desire, Kamadatu. (2) Heavens of the world of form, Rupadatu. (3) Heavens of the formless immaterial sphere.

### *Heavens of the World of Desire*

- (1st) On the 4th terrace of Mount Meru, Heaven of the Regents of the four cardinal points of space.
- (2nd) On the top of the Meru, the Jambudvipa, heaven of the 100 Gods governed by the 25 great Gods. Above the Meru, in mid air we find the following heavens:
- (3rd) Heaven, the palace of the Yama gods.
- (4th) The Tusita Heaven. Radiant residence of the Bodhisattvas.
- (5th) Nirmanarati. Heaven of the gods rejoicing in their creation. "God saw that his work was good". (Genesis.)
- (6th) Heaven of the Paranirmitas, Gods ruling over the creations of others.

### *Heavens of the World of Form*

Consist of the four groups corresponding to the four degrees of Dhyana.

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
|                               | Brahmapasadycha, Hvn. of the train of Brahma.    |
| 1st heavens of contemplation. | Brahmapurohita, Hvn. of the chaplains of Brahma. |
|                               | Mahabrahmanas, Hvn. of the theological jewels.   |
|                               | Parittabha, Hvn. of limited splendour.           |
| 2nd heavens of contemplation. | Apamanabha, Hvn. of immeasurable splendour.      |
|                               | Abhasvara, Hvn. of radiance.                     |

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	Paritta subbha, Hvn. of measurable beauty.
3rd heavens of contemplation.	Apramanabha [subha, Hvn. of immeasurable beauty. Subha Kristna, Hvn. of complete beauty. Anabhakas, cloudless heaven. Punyaprasava, born to merit. Brihatphalas, of abundant fruit,
4th heavens of contemplation.	Avrihat, effortless. Atapas, heatless. Sudrisas, beautiful heaven. Sudarsana, heaven of well being. Akmistha, Sublime heaven.

Among the heavens of the Formless sphere, Arupya, we find no more places (lokas) but aspects, Akaras, modalities of attributes. First, three heavens which although formless still retain consciousness and corresponding representations of states of being.

1. Realm of the infinity of space, *Akasanantyayatana*.
2. Realm of infinity of intellect, *Vijnanayatana*.
3. Realm of infinity of non-entity, *Akimchanyayatana*.

Then comes the last and supreme heaven:

4. The realm without consciousness or unconsciousness, *Maivasamjnanasamjnanayatana*.

This exalted transcendent plane and condition still retains some trace of Chitta, the divine vehicle of consciousness of Ishvara. Otherwise if there were no trace of Chitta with its virtual possibility of consciousness, Nirvana would be attained with its complete surpassing of all limiting attributes.

Constituted by progressively more subtle and less circumscribed and definite conditions, these planes provide as many specific fields for the exercise of corresponding forms of consciousness. When as a result of increasing adequation of the human unit of consciousness to the higher forms of

consciousness, pertaining to higher aspects of Cosmic organization, the coarse habits of thinking and feeling corresponding to lower planes are discarded and man becomes able to function on higher planes in proportion to the establishment of his vehicles of consciousness on those planes. Every time that in the double process of discarding outgrown mental conditions and establishing faculties of response to finer degrees of world organization, man becomes able to make his debut on a new plane of functioning, he is said to have undergone an initiation.

Various schools have their own classifications of these degrees along the road to union. These classifications have no precise value as they pertain to states of consciousness most of which are above the realm of quantitative analytical discrimination. Yet they give interesting indications.

Thus the Tibetans describe eight degrees of Dhyana, four corresponding to the heavens of form and four to the formless heavens. The first degree includes five minor steps or initiations:

1. *Vitarka*, capacity to analyze one's thought.
2. *Visara*, reflection on results of analyses, considered as objective.
3. *Priti*, control of interest taken in reflection on analysis.
4. *Sukha*, high felicity resulting from the abstraction of Priti.
5. *Ekagrata*, acute concentration resulting from abstraction.

In the second degree, *Vitarka* and *Visara* are transcended, leaving only the abstract conditions, without objective and formal perception. It consists of: *Priti*, *Sukha*, *Ekagrata*, the three higher states of the former degree.

The third retains these three states and adds two new ones.

III. *Priti*, which disappears almost entirely,

*Sukha*

*Ekagrata*

*Smriti*, awareness turned on objects.

*Upeksha*, serene equanimity.



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In the fourth degree, Priti and the felicity of Sukha disappear leaving only :

*Ekagrata*, keen concentration reaching freedom from all attachment to the world and from the three inferior modes of meditation.

*Smriti*, awareness of outer factors or of distinct subjectivity.

*Upeksha*, serenity in lofty access to omnitude, beyond any possibility of division or outer interference.

This fourth degree of Dhyana corresponds to the *via illuminativa*. Beyond this come four states of formless union on the four higher Brahmalokas or divine planes. They correspond to the *via contemplativa* of the West. They are beyond any objectivity and correspond to degrees of intimacy with the formless reality. They bear the name of the four higher Brahmalokas.

*Akasanantyayatana*. Consciousness in infinite space, a state of "pure" spatial consciousness, void of any sense of direction, dimension, quantity or limiting description.

*Vinjananantyayatana*. Consciousness of infinite self-consciousness. A state transcending all limiting consequences of self-consciousness resulting from the inclusion of consciousness in a personalized, localized, temporal and separate entity.

*Akimshanyayatana*. Consciousness freed even from the awareness of infinite consciousness, considered also as a limiting factor.

*Maivasamjnanasamjnanayatana*. Beyond perception and non-perception. All attributes have disappeared in pure consciousness which has become so purified both from objective impingement and from any spatial and temporal localisation of consciousness in a sense of individualised selfhood, that supreme consciousness reaches infinitude and becomes a pure virtuality without any limiting actuality.

It is interesting to note that Sukha, the blissful felicity experienced when consciousness rises above any form of self interest or self concern, far from being the supreme

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peak of mystical achievement is only an elementary step towards a really transcendent union. Far from being a goal it has to be surpassed to attain to purer and more exalted states of boundless and unconditioned freedom.

The Zen schools offer similar classifications of the stages of Dhyana. They describe two general degrees of Moksha, union, ensuing upon the practice of Dhyana.

1st. *Rupavimoksha*, union on the planes of form; along four degrees.

1. Elimination of all self-centered sentiments and ideas, but intellect and sentiment remaining active.
2. Intellect is entirely collected and subdued, but subtle ideas are retained together with joy.
3. Serenity increases and joy attains full bloom.
4. Joy disappears to make place for unalloyed infinite serenity.

IIInd. *Arupavimoksha* (Union in formless reality.)

1. Contemplation of spatial infinity in its homogeneity.
2. Contemplation of infinity of consciousness.
3. Contemplation transcending space and consciousness.
4. Contemplation transcending even distinction between space and consciousness.

The extraordinary Hindu genius for classifying that which is supposed to be beyond formulation has given rise to amazing enumerations of different Samadhis or highest contemplative union. The Mahavyutpatti gives a list of 118 Samadhis, the supreme degree of which is the Sanyska-Samadhi, fusion of the three Samadhis of the void, or Sunyata-Samadhi, of the disappearance of the objective universe, Aphanihita Samadhi, and of the absolute cessation of objective consciousness. Taking man beyond the beatific condition, the higher forms of Samadhi are considered as introducing him to a state of being which is superior to the highest forms of heavenly bliss. The great doctor Buddhagosha said that when man has attained Samadhi, he ceases to long for Heaven and its felicities.

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Through the centuries mystical experiences, both in the form of ecstasies and illuminations have been a prominent feature of the life of the many Buddhist monasteries spread over Central and Eastern Asia. Yet there are few accounts of those experiences. In this, Buddhism resembles its Hindu forbear. The reasons are the same in the two cases. They are of a double order, subjective and objective. While Hinduism holds that the Supreme Divine Reality is formless, absolutely subtle and overpersonal in His infinity, Buddhism goes even further. While Southern Buddhists refuse actually to entertain any idea of a God, whether personal or impersonal, Mahayanists, while remaining more faithful to the original doctrine of the founder, and even annexing a large part of the Hindu Pantheon in a Buddhist garb, hold a more definite conception of the impersonality and even of the vacuity of the supreme Reality than even the Hindu Advaitism. This conception of course effectively precludes any propensity of the mystic to "dress up" spiritual experiences in the garb of personal images and describable representations.

The subjective reason for the absence of ecstatic rhapsodies in Buddhist literature lies in its psychology. It shows very clearly that the brilliant visions of clairvoyance are not even of a really mystical nature and that the rapturous joy accompanying the eradication of the limitations of ordinary self-centered consciousness is but a mere preliminary to the really transcendent states. Hence, the urge to describe these intermediary stages even with their sublime felicity and splendid visions, disappears. Not only these happy conditions, which some other mystics look upon as being the highest reward of man, are not considered as desirable; but they evoke some apprehension, since their enjoyment may cause delay in the dissolution of all fetters impeding the entity in his flight to the Infinite. However, if we have no great Buddhist literature of mystical effusions, we have in Buddhist hagiography abundant proofs of an intense mystical



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activity all through the ages in the ancient and immense field of Buddhism. However illusory the contents of ecstatic experiences may be, and however transitory their contribution, their quest has been fostered in many Buddhist communities. They are held to be of practical advantages in the two fields of ethics and of understanding. Experiences of ecstatic felicity greatly reinforce a disciple's capacity for virtuous living since it helps him to realize the impermanence of the desiring self. It deprives also outer objects of their allurements since they are perceived to be unreal.

On the other hand a familiarity with the different types of Samadhi consciousness helps to realize the various modalities of the process of the attachment to separate and limited existence of all aspects of consciousness, even the most subtle ones, which is the Buddhist theory of the creation of differentiated entities. The description of this process of arresting the undifferentiated flow of pure being, and encasing in it the vortices of separativity of limiting forms of ever growing density and dullness, as it progresses down along the cascades of the increasingly differentiating planes, corresponds to the involution procession of Plotinus. It is the Buddhist conception of the creation of the objective world and closely resembles traditional Hindu theories.

The understanding of the processes of the ensheathing of the essential homogeneous unity of the void of Sunyata, into formative differentiation, enables the disciple to form a clearer conception of the steps of the opposite process by which the separate entity will be able to untie the bonds imprisoning a moment of the infinite Reality in the dungeon of his personal separate being.

Thus we find in the Kevadda Sutta the story of Bikshu who was so proficient in the practice of ecstasies that he could at will pass from Heaven to Heaven and was using his attainments to ascertain under what conditions the elements of worldly appearances cease to find a responsive focus in the mind and consequently disappear, setting free the localized consciousness.

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But just as wiser Yogis condemn the search for magical powers, genuine Buddhism considers the performance of extraordinary feats of control over the laws of nature as void of any spiritual value and their pursuit as unworthy of even a beginner in the quest of liberating wisdom.

Even in the case when such powers have been attained, their use and display is entirely unworthy of an honourable and pious disciple. They constitute an act of moral violence upon the laity, tending to compel their adhesion by a sort of trickery instead of appealing to their divine intuition. This is why Buddha, considering miracles as forms of spiritual imposition, never would resort to them. He rebuked sharply one of his advanced disciples who in order to impress the populace which was not very receptive to the message, had risen ten feet in the air and circled thus three times around Rajagriha. Said the Tathagatha "What thou hast done is not fitting for a Sramana. Thou hast behaved like a woman who unveils her body and shows herself for a piece of money. It is not thus that the non-converted will become converts." (Cullavagga V: 8.) It is not by witnessing strange phenomena that the hearts of men will become pure and freed from attachment to phenomena and its illusions. Thus we see how in the light of high Buddhist morality, any modern teacher holding before his pupils the allurements of magic powers in any form, betrays a lack of understanding of the Doctrine and lays himself open to a questioning of his motives.

But, although Buddhism formally condemns the quest and display of magical powers and even considers mystical trances and ecstasies as but transitory steps to the exalted end of complete liberation, having no final value in themselves; the followers of the Good Law bring a great contribution to the mystical tradition of mankind, by taking for granted the faculty of the human mind to reach states of consciousness far transcending those attainable by the mere use of the senses, testifying to the fact that, as Pascal puts

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it "Man passes man infinitely" and that our present experience of life is a mere rudiment of what it is called to become eventually. Even its rather deprecatory attitude towards the most concrete form of ecstasies is a testimony to its experience of their existence. Moreover in its keen analyses of the successive phases of Dhyana, it helps us to better appreciate the fundamental differences between the three greatly distinct categories of transcendent experiences. First comes mere psychism, dealing with the world of formal causes preparing the coming manifestations on the physical plane, then the more spiritual phase of the sublimation of subjective conditions through purification and detachment from forms, and finally the supreme experience transcending both objectivity and subjectivity.

Thus Buddhism in spite of its radical pragmatism in the pursuit of the Absolute, brings a great contribution to our appreciation both of the relative values of our empirical personalities and of their experiences in the phenomenal universe to which so many human beings limit their perspective of life with such dire consequences to themselves and to their fellow beings. Therefore Buddhism takes a most honourable place in the stately array of the great spiritual traditions and the lofty figure of the Tathagatha, the gem of Indian spirituality, is worthy of the respectful regard and gratitude of even those who do not feel attracted by the somewhat rarefied, if pure, atmosphere of his doctrine.



## LECTURE V

### *Greek and Hebrew Sources of Christian Mystical Theology*

**I**N THE expression of its experiences, nascent Christian mysticism was naturally strongly influenced by the religious traditions and representations prevailing in the land of its birth. Roughly speaking two great influences combined to form the springboard from which it was to soar to its glorious destinies.

The first followers of Christ had received their religious education, with its stock of images and representations, from Israel. As soon as the Christian doctrine spread to the Gentile world, it came under the influence of Hellenistic philosophy, then prevailing in all the ancient world. Both the Israelite and the Hellenistic religious views were largely syncretistic, embodying many factors borrowed from most of the other religions of antiquity. Therefore we shall not unduly restrict our search of the origins of Christian mystical theology if we limit it to these two sources. In fact even these two traditions had also largely merged some of their most important concepts to give birth to Gnosticism. Its different sects were seeking to attain the gnosis of an inner religious "truth" through a liberal mixture of all known religions. They played an important part in the life of early Christian communities, which while fighting them vigorously, could not help being influenced by the general atmosphere they helped to create.

At first glance it would seem paradoxical to attempt to describe a Jewish mysticism. Early Israelites were not beseeching their God to grant them spiritual favours but mater-

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ial benefits such as the destruction of their enemies, new lands, the multiplication of their chattels and abundant fecundity of their wives. Like the early Vedic Aryans, they sought above all a long and plentiful life on this earth and showed little concern about another world.

Their attitude corresponded to the passage of the Genesis saying that after the six days of creation, God looked at His work and saw that it was good. Therefore life in the world was good and some rabbinical schools held that it was sinful to neglect any opportunity of enjoying the gifts of God as provided in His creation.

However materializing this concept, there was also a mystic strain in Israel as attested by some of the prophets. Isaiah XXXIII "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burning? He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppression, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty, they shall behold the land that is very far off."

Since the spiritual aspect of human nature is bound to assert itself, some Jews had high spiritual faculties and they naturally sought to account for their mystical experiences by comparing them with those of the seers of the peoples among whom they lived. Thus there were two streams in religious Israel. While the "Nebi", the Prophets, maintained fiercely nationalistic tradition, the "Rohe", the mystic seers, enriched their metaphysics with borrowings from other peoples. Originally Israel partook of the general religious representations common to the other Semitic peoples. The gods of their various groups had been borrowed "en bloc" from the Akkadian Pantheon and bore the same names, Allah, Elohim, Baal, Bal, Ishtar, Astarte, Malik, Melek, Molok. As in all primitive religious forms, the tribal and

totemistic nature of Jahveh is expressed by his strong connection with the national soil. Every one of the Elohim is master of his territory. Yahveh must reckon with other Gods. His rule ends where theirs begins. Hence the answer of Jephtha to the King of the Ammonites "That with which thy god Kamosh has possessed thee, dost thou not own it? And all that our god Yahveh has given us, do we not own it?" Of course there is a strong incentive to mysticism in that view of the intrinsic relation between the God of the group and his soil and all that lives on it.

This direct filiation of Israel to his God is indicated by many theophoric names, such as Ben Hadad, Ben Nebo, son of Hadad or Nebo among the Arameans or Abi Melek (Melek is my father) among the Canaanites. Ultimately this notion of the participation in the essence of their God led the Israelites to the idea of the Shekina, the diffuse radiant Divine Presence protecting Israel as a whole and in which all pure and sinless Hebrews participate individually.

Besides the influence of other Semitic tribes, there were also strong Chaldean influences coming from Babylon. Even after the Egyptian conquest of Syria about 1600 B.C., Canaan continued to belong to the orbit of Babylonian civilization. When the conquests of David and Solomon brought new wealth and power to Israel, its cities developed a material sophistication very remote from the ancestral pastoralism. The struggle against foreign Gods and foreign ways which was the origin of Hebrew monotheism was also the reaction of naturist simplicity against the corrupt worldliness of city civilization. The good Abel was a shepherd and criminal Cain, an agriculturalist. The city of Babel with its towering architecture, was an offense to the God of the tent dwellers. Eliah incarnated this nationalistic and mystical reaction against international syncretism, in favour of the humble and pious against the worldly rich corrupted by foreign gods.

Some modern authors have systematized these two ten-



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dencies, in two opposite attitudes, the prophetic and the mystic, mysticism being prevalent in Hinduism and Neoplatonism while prophetism prevailed in Zoroastrianism, Mosaism, Christianity and Islam. While this provides a rather pleasant opportunity for intellectual contrasts we can not help but consider this view as arbitrary and remote from the facts. It seems indeed very unwarranted to oppose prophets to mystics since the very act of prophecy is rooted in supersensory experience in which the subject has risen above the limitations of time to be aware of the causes at work to project future events in this world. Indeed we have in the meeting of Moses with God an inkling of a pure mystical experience untainted by any intellectual attempt at describing the undescribable.

To Moses asking "Let me behold thy glory" Yahveh answered "No mortal can see me and live! But come, thou shalt stay in the hollow of the rock, I will cover thee with the hollow of my hand until I have passed. Then I shall withdraw my hand and thou wilt see me from behind, but my face could not be seen." We have here an affirmation of the incompatibility between the limitations of form and the absolute transcendent infinitude of the spirit. Moses' interdiction of making any image of God is another instance of his mystical realization of the impossibility of representing with finite means the transcendent and formless reality of God.

It would be perhaps nearer reality to say that prophecy is a tendency to relate mystical experiences to worldly events and interests while other worldly mystics tend to establish the pole of their aspirations in the realm of the Infinite Transcendence.

Be it as it may, it is evident that the simple pragmatism of the cult of primitive Hebrew nomads was soon superseded by more complex religious ideas, conducive to mysticism.

Thus, although it was combated by Gamaliel II, a dual-

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istic belief in the eternity of matter, probably coming from Persia or from the Sankhya, led pious men to forsake material ties to seek God in a life of purely spiritual endeavour. Also the belief in the pre-existence of the soul taught by Palestinian Rabbis, led to the attempt to attain divine union through recovery of the pristine purity of the soul by purification. The followers of that doctrine claimed to follow the text of Leviticus "Be ye holy as I am holy."

Both the Kabbala and the Talmud owe their origin to the Babylonian exile, particularly the Talmudic angelology, the description of the role of angels and other celestial hosts, in the lives of men and in creation. According to it, all beings are led and protected by spiritual entities constituting a hierarchy connecting the earth to God. As in Zoroastrianism, the angelic legions had a counterpart of infernal legions of demons, the somber armies of Metatron. The urge to escape the influence of demons led to a measure of ascetism, that hand-maid of mysticism, while the idea of a luminous spiritual world closely related to ours by bonds of a subtle and pure nature was a potent incentive to mystical endeavour. Hebrew scriptures contain many texts stressing the value of mystical virtues, particularly of humility, the most mystical of all.

"It is near the humble one that God lets his Shekina rest" Sota I. "The true sage is he who accepts lessons from everybody" Aboth IV. "He who is great is small and he who is small is great" Zohar. "If the fear of God is the crown of the Sages it is but the sandal of the humble" (Midrash azita.) "Those who receive injury without retaliating, who hear themselves slandered without retaliation, whose only guide is love, who accept with joy the ills of life, it is for them that it has been written in the prophets, —the friends of God are resplendent as the sun in all his strength" (Talmud schale F. 85.)

During the brilliant Hellenistic civilization which spread over the ancient world after Alexander's conquests, all na-

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tions from Egypt to Western India and from the Danube to Arabia exchanged their religious values as well as their material goods. Greek philosophy and religion without supplanting local cults, brought a complement to their metaphysics. During this great cultural period, two main tendencies predominated over Jewish spiritual life, the Talmudic Midrashic school of Palestine and the Judeo-Hellenistic of Egypt.

The Talmudic Midrashic school was the result of the influences of Eastern religions, mainly Zoroastrianism and Mithraism. Daniel, chief of the Babylonian Magi as well as prophet in Israel, was the leading figure in this syncretism which provided the main source of the Gnosis, as well as of the occult Kabbala. In striking parallel to the statement of Krishna in the Gita "having created this universe with a part of myself, I remain", the Palestinian school taught that "God is the abode of the universe, but the universe is not the abode of God". This is the double relation of God to the universe, at the same time immanent and transcendent, which is the basis of mystical theology. The Pharisees, who were trying to conciliate new foreign ways and ideas with the teachings of the Pentateuch, believed in metempsychosis, and in the influence of the stars on earthly events. These conceptions considering man as connected with a transcendent world of subtle nature through a series of semi-spiritual or fully spiritual entities, provided an incentive to efforts to transcend the limitations of ordinary consciousness. The Essenes, established in Palestine led lives of pure ascetism conducive to mystical awakening observing humility, poverty, chastity and charity, anticipating Christian contemplative orders.

The Judeo-Hellenistic school that flourished during the two first centuries before Christianity had become a dominant factor, and were mainly developed in Egypt, then a brilliant centre of Greek culture. The principal sources of that school were Aristobulus, Philo Judaeus and the Apocryphae



of the Wisdom of Solomon. Their doctrines were strongly influenced by Pythagoras, by the Stoics from whom they borrowed the notion of *Pneuma*, the all penetrating Divine Breath, and by Plato from whom they received the "ideas" and the *Nous*, or Divine Spiritual Essence of the Universe. Aristobulus blending the Greek and Jewish ideas on the nature of God, considered Him both as transcendent to the universe in His essence but immanent in creation as Divine Wisdom, (*Hokma* akin to the *Nous*). Soaring above traditional anthropomorphism, he gives a superbly metaphysical description of the Godhead: "He is full of Himself and sufficient unto Himself, equally before and after the creation of the universe, for he is unchangeable, requiring nothing else at all, so that things belong to him, but He..... belongs to nothing."

For Philo, God is transcendent but works in and on the universe by the intermediary of the *Logos*, of the Angels and of the "Powers" or *Dynameis*. In his soul, which is an emanation of the *Logos*, man is close to the Angels, the "Uncorporeal souls." Philo who restated the theory of mystical rebirth of the Greek mystery cults, gives evidence of mystical experience in his description of illumination: "One must first become God, which is impossible, in order to be able to understand God. If one will die to the mortal life and live the immortal, he will perhaps see what he has never seen. But even the sharpest vision will be unable to see the uncreated, for it will first be blinded by the piercing splendour and the rushing torrents of rays, just as fire affords light to those who stay at a proper distance but burns up those who come near" (Phil. Jud. Drummond I. 11-57).

Through his contribution to the school of Alexandria, Philo had a larger influence than his other co-religionists in the shaping of Christian theology. On the other hand, many of the Alexandrian mystical doctrines were widely spread among the Jewish communities. They were part of

the spiritual atmosphere in which Christian mysticism was to unfold, backing up with Greek mystical experience the Jewish tradition that not only Moses but also "the four Rabbis" had been able to visit heaven while alive.

If some Jewish philosophers made contributions to the syncretism of Alexandria, they themselves owed so much to Greek thought that they really belonged to the Hellenic mystical tradition, the other great source of early Christian background, which we shall now consider.

Mysticism can be traced back to the oldest cults of Greece. These, influenced by the mystery cults of Asia Minor and Egypt, taught through allegories the double nature of man, bound to the earth by his empirical activities, yet of a divine origin and essence. This doctrine was aptly expressed in the myth of Zagreus, in the ancient cult of Dionysos and later incorporated in Orphism. Under the form of a serpent, Zeus seduced his daughter Persephone, and begot a son Dionysos Zagreus, destined to become supreme lord of the earth. But the Titans, wanting to preserve their empire, tore the child to pieces and ate him. His divine nature was thus divided among them and held in bondage in their personalities. But his heart was saved by Athena. She brought it to Zeus who reincarnated his son in the form of Dionysos of Thebes, conceived from Semele the goddess of the earth. After the birth of Dionysos, the Titans were destroyed by the lightning of Zeus and their ashes gave birth to men.

Later in Orphism this gave rise to the idea that man was composed of an earthly, Titanic nature and of a divine or Dionysian one, which he must free from bondage to his Titanic part in order to return to God. This was to be achieved by the purification of the divine nature from the pollutions of the Titanic passions. The body is the grave of the soul which is subjected to its errors and its sufferings. When the Dionysian spark of the soul conquers the passions binding it to the allurements of the nether world, it escapes the necessity of rebirth.

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This idea of the essential unity of the divine principle in man and of the substance of the universe was the basis of the teachings of the various Greek mystery cults. In Eleusis, in Delphi, in Samothrace, candidates for initiation, after due purification and efforts to subjugate their earthly nature, received the allegorical teachings emphasizing the presence of the Creative Divine essence in all beings. From this essential unity of all creation springs *Sympathia* causing in all beings the urge to propinquity. If, according to Heracleitos, "*Polemos Pater panton*", opposition is the source of all differentiated existence, yet all beings carry in their innermost core a reminiscence of their origin and a yearning to return to unity. Hence the cycles of exchange between the realms of nature, all contributing to a unifying cooperation, to a reunion of the separated fragments of Dionysos.

The general *Sympathia* in the universe of souls was paralleled by a correspondence between the creatures of the earth and their divine causes. Poseidonius gave expression to this law of correspondence, saying "The things of the earth are in sympathy with the things of Heaven". This idea of a correspondence between our earthly world of effects and a heavenly world of causes and principles became the corner-stone of many occult doctrines. Boehme described the signature imprinted by God in his creatures. Goethe expressed it in his *Faust*, "*Alles Vergangliche ist nur ein Gleichnis*" (Everything in our passing world is but a resemblance). This law of correspondence is generally rendered "As above, so below."

The mystery cults, with their allegories and secret rituals dramatizing the divine filiation of man, and their well-guarded secrecy, made a strong appeal to the mystical enthusiasm of their disciples. After prolonged meditation and fasting, dressed in a white robe, the "*Candida*" which symbolized their purification and accounted for their name, the candidates were in a mood highly conducive to mystical experiences and many of them left the mystery temple with a



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new vision of the essential realities of life. These mystery cults marked the transition between the old tribal religious forms in which the individual was immersed in the collectivity and the modern personalized forms in which the individual sought God of his own freewill. An Athenian was born in the cult of Athena, but entered deliberately on the path of the mystagogues.

Greek mysticism was not cultivated in the shade of the mysteries alone, it was elucidated in its nature and principles by the philosophical genius of Hellas. Pythagoras, one of the greatest men of all time, provided the transition from the mystical and irrational elements of the mysteries to the clear and harmonious structures of philosophy. If the rule of life of his institute resembled the catharsis of the Orphic communities, he gave his ascetic and initiatory prescriptions a rational foundation. While based on the study of nature, in which he anticipated Galileo, Copernicus and Kepler by twenty centuries, his purpose was spiritual and mystical, aiming to lead man to divine union through a pure and ethical life and the scientific practice of meditation. Hierocles, the famous Pythagorean, declared: "By following them every one can attain to truth and virtue, render himself pure, assume happily a likeness to God," and, as said in the *Timaeus* of Plato, "after having attained his health and integrity, recover the luminous path of his pristine state" (Commentary on the Golden verses.) This mystical union of the immortal part of man's soul with the Divine Soul was the aim, and the body was considered as the grave of the soul which was alive and free in the measure in which its earthly body was subjugated, and inversely.

While subduing their bodies, Pythagoreans also strove to free their souls from earthbound psychological habits. Hierocles tells the disciple that: "Together with the discipline (*askesis*) and virtue, he shall also be diligent in the radiant body — *Agoeides* — . . . . the subtile vehicle of the soul . . . the end of the method . . . was that they

should become furnished with the wings to soar to the reception of Divine blessings". And as in the beatitude of Jesus "Blessed are the pure in heart." Hierocles adds: "Just as it is necessary to adorn the soul with science and virtue, so that it may be able to keep company with those who are eternally wise and virtuous, so also must we make our radiant body, pure and free from matter so that it may bear communion with the ethereal bodies."

Liberation was to be attained not by outer observance of ritual prescriptions but by the soul-unfettering influence of a "pure life, "God is to be honoured by virtue, not by costly sacrifice or by song." Pythagoreans opposed the spiritually liberating activity of the soul to world-engrossing activity of the body, and their mystical attitude was adopted by philosophic antiquity whose formula, "Sustine et abstine" meant: accept with good grace the unavoidable blows of fortune and refrain from all earthly undertakings which are not strictly enjoined by duty.

Most of the thinkers of antiquity were influenced by Pythagorean mystical thought. The greatest among these was Plato who owed to it the origin of his theory of archetypal ideas, the original patterns of all creatures in the world of causes, his teaching of metempsychosis and his theory of reminiscence, the vague remembrance of past lives as a basis for intuition.

While those ideas had been taught before him in secret mystical circles, Plato brought them out into the broad daylight of Academic teaching, endowed with the prestige of his incomparable poetry. In particular he presented to the cultured public the fundamental idea of myticism, that the true universe of which man is already a citizen although he does not know it, is not this drab common-place earth subjected to the fetters of fatality, but the luminous if unseen world of Divine Ideas, archetypes of all present and future creation.

His object is to introduce wisdom and harmony in man's

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conduct so that his soul shall avoid further entanglement in earthly bondage and become able to soar upwards to union with its divine origin. "There will always be evil in this nether world; but one effort is imperative; as quickly as possible to forsake this lower world for the higher. This evasion is achieved by assimilating oneself to God in the measure of the possible, and assimilation is attained by becoming just and holy in the clarity of the spirit" (From the *Theaetetus*).

Plato's theory of the tripartite composition of the soul in keeping with the general mystical view, is a guide to his conception of the soul's relation by God. A lower aspect, the vegetative soul presided at the birth and activities of the body. Next came the irrational soul, seat of man's passions and attachment to the material world. These two inferior souls were directed toward the spiritually deadening inclusion in what the Orphics called the "Cycles of birth and becoming" in striking analogy to the Hindu Wheel of *Samsara*. Those inferior souls directed towards the world of mortality were themselves mortal. The third or rational soul, in its serene harmony is constituted in the likeness of the Divine Origin of the universe and is immortal. The lower souls provided the necessary connection between the purely spiritual rational soul steeped in eternal unity and the coarse realm of matter. One finds in Plato a definite dualism leading to the negation of the absolute value of this world of appearances, which is the basis of all mysticism. This inferiority of the manifested universe extends even to its animating principle, the *Anima Mundi*, the world soul, considered to be inferior to man's spiritual soul. This is made clear by Aristotle in his comments on Plato's *Timaeus*. "In Plato's view it is better for the soul to be without body of any kind, for life in a body is full of toil for it. He believed moreover that the cosmos will never be dissolved and so the soul of the universe will be in a less fortunate state than, and not on an equality with, our souls



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inasmuch as these will at some time be free from their body."

Thus Plato in urging men to free themselves from material fetters to rise to the radiant world of ideas and above them to their rational essence, was a great influence in the mystical atmosphere of the civilization into which Christianity was born.

The latest of the great metaphysical geniuses of Greece, Plotinus exercised the most profound influence on all religious and mystical teachers, both pagan and Christian of the first Christian centuries. Accepted by most of the early fathers and doctors of the church, his doctrines played a capital role in the formulation of the Christian mystical theology.

In the measure in which both the mystical quest and the interpretation of its experiences, are patterned by prevailing teachings, Plotinus was one of the chief influences in the organization of the mystical atmosphere of Christianity. In his famous system of *Cosmogogenesis* describing the procession of the universe from God and its ensuing conversion back to its Divine Source, Plotinus is the precursor of all Western theories of spiritual evolution. From the ineffable Godhead, creation proceeds through successive hypostases along a chain of emanations of ever less divine and ever more circumscribed and specified orders until the process of involution reaches its ultimate in the world of matter. Then the evolutionary process begins, producing ever more organized, more responsive, purer forms of an ever more harmonious nature leading eventually to such a spiritualisation of the universe that it will become pure enough to be re-absorbed in its divine origin, ending thus the conversion of the Cosmos. Plotinus taught that the human soul can accelerate for herself this universal process and attain immediately to reunion with the Divine in unbounded felicity.

One of his outstanding contributions was the teaching of a radical difference between the absolute Godhead and the

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subsequent Divine creative power in the universe. This essential doctrine, necessary to the understanding of the higher aspects of mystical union, had already been formulated by many spiritual teachers. Postulated by Zoroaster as the necessary antecedent of his dualism, it had been stressed by the Alexandrian Philo Judaeus who in conformity with one of the basic Hindu doctrines, described three kinds of life in the universe. The inferior was life as it concerns the visible world. Then comes life as animating the subtle world of causes, intermediary between the "gross world and the Divine Cause. Above this tenuous world transmitting divine creative impulsions to the material world, was the highest mode of life, that of God. Plato had already expressed this idea, but it was Plotinus who gave it its full formulation, describing a trinity as the cause of our world. It consisted of:

I—The one. Soaring above any differentiation was the Absolute, unconditioned Godhead. "The One is not a being but the source of being which is its first offspring. The One is perfect, that is, it has nothing, seeks nothing, needs nothing, but we may say it overflows and this overflowing is creative". (Enneads V. 12.)

II—The Nous. Spirit or Divine Mind as manifestation of the One. A veritable "Word", source or being for all divine ideas and causes, inspiring the intelligible world. Out of the Nous, intermediary between the Absolute and the finite world, springs the

III—Psyche, soul and causal life of our physical universe and its animating principle, cause and support of all beings.

Accordingly, man was of a threefold nature, as expressed by St Paul, Body (soma), Soul (psyche) and Spirit (Nous). To these correspond the three degrees of the mystic way, purification of the body and its appetites, illumination of the psyche through its progressive adequation to the intelligibles, and contemplation attained when man had developed the spiritual wings enabling him to commune with the nous.

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The famous terminology of the steps of Christian Mystical theology, *Via Purgativa*, *Via Illuminativa* and *Via Contemplativa*, was inspired in Dionysius the Areopagite by Plotinus.

The human mind is the meeting place of the *Nous* and the *Psyche*. While the apex of the soul is in *Nous* its lowest part is in *Psyche*, directed towards separation and objectivity. In this view, reminiscent of, but less transcendent than the *Atma Triad* of India, the celestial soul aspires to union with the spirit, while the natural soul, *Psyche*, inspires beings of the natural world and gives them reality. The world *Psyche*, *Anima Mundi*, is the Divine Eternal Life immersed in creation. "The whole creation is alive and alive at every point." (*Enn.* IV. 4, 33). And at every point of the *Cosmos* the underlying *Psyche* is evoking the transcendent presence of the *Nous*, radiant essence of being and beauty.

Another contribution of Plotinus was his qualified conception of immanence. Plato considered the Mind of God, the "World Artist" as immanent in the "idea of the Good", which was itself a sort of spiritual world matrix. On the contrary, Plotinus, avoiding the danger of "nailing" Divinity to creation, held the world of ideas, the "Intelligible world" to be immanent in the mind of God. For this genius anticipating Kant by fifteen centuries, space and time were forms imposed on our experience by our senses and the human soul is the meeting point of the Intelligible Universe and of the phenomenal universe, in the region where *Psyche* contacts the *Nous*, corresponding to the Hindu *Antahkarana*. Hence the possibility of reaching mystical consciousness, by shaking off the hold of the phenomenal universe on man's attention, thus ascending to a perception of his intrinsic relation to the radiant world of the *Nous*.

The Plotinian conception of Divine Immanence did not mean that God was divided among individuals as in the myth of Osiris, but that each individual partakes of the fullness of the whole in the measure of his spiritual recepti-



vity, in a process somewhat resembling the Catholic conception of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost preparing souls for the reception of Grace. This process of spiritual participation, foundation of mystical theology, was further elucidated by Proclus who said "There are three sorts of wholes, the first, anterior to the parts; the second composed of the parts, the third knitting into one stuff the parts of the whole."

This idea was adopted by the Church Fathers. Thus St. Augustine in his Epistles: "God can be present in all things and all in single things." St. Bonaventura said even more explicitly "Wholly in all things and wholly beyond them, thus is the intelligible sphere whose centre is everywhere, and the circumference nowhere." *Itin. Ment. a Deo.*

Ecstasy is the bliss experienced upon union of the soul with its Divine Source in achieved fulfilment and unbounded felicity. Plotinus claimed to have attained this divine union several times and this is corroborated by his disciple Porphyry. Plotinus' accounts of his ecstasies are among the most sublime pages of mystical literature and have inspired countless thousands of noble souls, within as well as outside of Christianity.

That Plotinus was a practical mystic was attested by his description of the complementary modes of approach to the apotheosis of consciousness. The first way lies in awakening by fitting exercises the intuition of Divine Omnipresence in the outside world, when it is considered from the standpoint of the *Nous*. "There they see all not in process of becoming, but in being. Each being contains within itself the whole intelligible world and also beholds it complete in each particular being . . . Each is there in All and All in each." (*Enn. V-8.*)

In the second method, the soul instead of seeking the divine in the outside world, strives to recognize its own divine identity. "Often when I awake from the slumber of the body, and come to myself and step out of the outward world in order to turn in upon myself, I behold a wonder-

ful beauty. Then I believe unshakably that I belong to a better world: most glorious light works strongly in me and I am become one of the Godhead. Transferred into this, I have reached that vital energy and I have raised myself above all intelligible things. When I then climb down from this rest in the lap of the Godhead to intellectual understanding I ask myself how there can possibly be a sinking back out of that condition." (Enn. VI.)

Some authors have sought to describe two different types of mysticism based on these two processes. It seems to us that these so called two mystical ways are really successive degrees of a single process. From a self-bound dualistic mode of consciousness in which the subject feels his opposition to an outside universe, it leads to a monistic ecstasy in which the subject, merged in the Divine Object of contemplation, loses sense of his personal limited being and ultimately reaching the Supreme, loses consciousness altogether. Far from affording a confirmation of the dual theory of mysticism, as is sometimes claimed, the descriptions of Plotinus are really an argument against it, since these different aspects of consciousness have been experienced by the same man.

With Plotinus, the mystical experience was freed from the almost fantastic atmosphere of the mysteries to become the sacred link between the essence of religion and the culmination of practical philosophy.

Anticipating by nearly two thousand years our modern anti-intellectual criticism, Plotinus insisted on the necessity of transcending the limitations of intellectual activity. "This consciousness of the whole, comes not by knowledge but by an actual presence superior to any knowledge. To have it the soul must rise above knowledge, above all its wanderings from its unity". (Enn). This superintellectual character of the mystical gnosis is repeatedly stressed in the Enneads: "The soul when possessed by intense love of Him diverts herself from all forms which she has, even of that

which is derived from intelligence, for it is impossible, when in conscious possession of any other attribute, either to behold Him or to be harmonized with Him" (VI. 7, 34).

When intellectual denudation is achieved, the One appears to the soul. "And they are no longer two but one, and the soul is no longer conscious of the body nor of the mind, but knows that she has what she desired, that she is where no deception can come, and that she would not exchange her bliss for all the heavens of heaven."

But, if intellectual information, that is, the construction of forms in our consciousness, is too often a soul limiting and binding process, however it can become an instrument of spiritual progress if we transfer it from self-seeking activities to disinterested purposes, such as the scientific quest of truth or the contemplation of beauty, through which we can sense its divine cause.

Plotinus attaches a great importance to the spiritual value of esthetic contemplation, giving the fundamental principles of its contribution. He begins by disclosing its origin. Beauty is the sensuous manifestation of the glorious perfection of the Nous and the signature of Psyche in the world of forms, sounds and colours. The beautiful is "a Fragment of the Primal beauty, making beautiful to the fulness of their capacity whatsoever it grasps and moulds." (I-6-6).

In order to receive any impression from an object, there must be in us elements corresponding to its nature, and capable of responding to its values. "All knowing comes by likeness". (En. I. 6-1). Being a creature of the Cause of all things, man has in his makeup a trace of the presence of the creator of beautiful objects and through its connection with the Nous his Psyche can have the intuition of the Divine Beauty and of the Divine Rectitude inherent in all aspects of creation true to their "Idea."

But the soul has become encumbered by all manner of erroneous views and vision-distorting habits. Therefore the lover of beauty must set his inner house in order, restoring



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his capacity for clear vision and enlightenment by a radical purification. "Cutting away all that is excessive, straightening out all that is crooked, bringing light to all that is in shadow, labouring to make all one glory of beauty . . . . Each must become Godlike and beautiful who cares to see God and beauty". (En. 1-6, 9).

Through this purification, the soul becomes able to perceive the full beauty in objects through a recognition of the inherent presence of their Divine Cause. This in its turn lifts the Psyche to a higher harmony with the operations of the Source of Beauty. "The material becomes beautiful by participating in the thought which flows from the Divine" (En. 1-6, 2).

If the sentiment of the beautiful results from the perception of the Psyche at work in its creation, which is properly an illumination, this can lead to high contemplation if one can ascend from the perception of the active Psyche to its Divine Cause. Thus there is a progression from the perception of the pleasing aspects of the body (Soma) to that of the beauty imparted to it by its ensouling and conforming "Psyche", finally to contemplate the exalted transcendent essence of Psyche, the Nous source of all harmonious perfection.

Whosoever beholds beauty in any form, takes a step on the way leading to the contemplation of the One. In the vein of St. Paul and St. Augustine, Plotinus declares that the value of beauty comes from its power to awaken love which is the main agent of man's ascension. "It detaches the soul from the body and lifts it up to the intelligible world". (En. III-6, 5). He stresses further in a truly admirable mood that "The fullest life is the fullest love and love comes from the Celestial Light which streams forth from the Absolute One." (En-VI-7, 23).

Plotinus was in no way a hedonist and always remained within the pale of spiritual ethics, insisting that material objects were to be used and contemplated only in order to

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transcend them. "For all, there are two stages on the path according to whether they are still ascending or have already gained the upper sphere. The first stage is conversion from the lower life, the second taken by those who have already reached the spiritual sphere as it were, set a footprint there, but must still advance within that realm, and it lasts until they reach its extreme summit, the term attained when the topmost peak of the spiritual realm is won". (I. 3, 1).

Love fulfils its divine mission by bringing about the re-union of souls with their divine Source, when they join the ranks of the successful lovers of the Absolute Source of Beauty who have attained "the splendour yonder and felt the burning flame of love for that which is there to know, the passion of the lover resting on the bosom of his love." (Enn. VI-9, 4).

Many of the Church Fathers were imbued with the Plotinian idea that beauty is the messenger of God. Saint Augustine in particular rebuked the beauty-hating ascetics who were deriding and even desecrating masterpieces of Pagan art. Rising against despisers of worldly splendours, he said "There is no health in those who find fault in any part of Thy creation". (Confessions VII, 14).

The direct influence of Plotinus on the theory of beauty of Augustine is proven by his almost verbatim reproduction of the teachings of the author of the *Enneads*. They both describe three degrees in beauty: corporeal, spiritual and Divine (Enn. I-6, 4.—*De Ordine* II 16-42). The mechanism of the projection of divine beauty in objects is the same. "The divine reflects its beauty in the Spiritual which reflects it in the corporeal". (En. I-6, 8, III, 8, ii; *DE LIB. ARB.* II-16-47). Conversely, to lead man to God, love of beauty had to be lifted from beauty in bodies to the transcendent beauty engendered by virtuous action resulting from adhesion of man's free will to the Divine harmony, for "Righteousness is the truest beauty."

In a way strangely reminiscent not only of Plotinus but

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also of Hinduism and Buddhism, St. Augustine describes seven degrees along the ascent to divine communion through contemplation of beauty.

In the first three, correspond- ( The soul adopts an increasing to the *via purgativa*, and ( ingly esthetic attitude in respectively described as: ( life.

1. Animation
2. Sensation
3. Reason of art

In the fourth and fifth: ( The soul learns self-control,  
 4. Virtue or beautiful action ( opening itself to illumina-  
 5. Tranquillity, or inner ( tion resulting from inner  
 beauty ( harmony, through the per-  
 ( ception of spiritual beauty  
 ( under the physical.

In the sixth and seventh de- ( The soul turns to God, seen  
 grees: ( as Pure Beauty.

6. Approach
7. Contemplation

This description corresponds closely to that of Plato in his *Phaedrus* and of Plotinus (*Enn. VI. i*). This appreciation of beauty has remained one of the dominant characteristics of Christian worldly expression, from the Cistercian cathedrals to the art of Fra Angelico and the *Canticle* to the Sun of St. Francis. Undoubtedly the Plotinian appreciation of beauty as a divine expression was one of the factors which led Christians to depart from the Mosaic command not to make religious images.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the influence of Plotinus on Christian mysticism. While Plato, and later Aristotle played a leading part in the formulation of our Theology, he chiefly influenced contemplatives and mystics. One of his personal disciples, Victorius, after being converted to Christianity, became one of the masters of St. Augustine upon whom he had such an influence that the North African Saint has been called "the spiritual child of Plotinus." (*Underhill-Mysticism*).



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Gnosticism, a typical instance of the syncretist tendency of the ripe decline of antiquity, also made a great contribution to the spiritual atmosphere in which early Christian mysticism developed. Sometimes Gnosticism is referred to as if it had been a definite religious doctrine. At best it was only a general tendency. There were literally hundreds of Gnostic teachers all trying in the spirit of their time to synthesize the religious teachings which had been brought together in Europe, Asia and Africa in the great cultural community of ancient civilization. The main character of the gnostics was that they sought not only to blend various doctrines but also to elucidate the deeper truths hidden in their scriptures, which they held to be more symbolic than literal. Another important character was that while many of the other syncretist groups, rejected Christianity, as was the case with NeoPlatonists, Gnostics gave the teachings of Jesus a very important place in their systems. Yet this inclusion of Christianity is not an indispensable trait of Gnosticism. Some of the teachings given before Christ, such as those of the Alexandria Jews, Aristobule and Philo, are also considered as belonging to it, since they already display the spirit of post-Christian Gnosticism.

The main elements of Gnosticism were the noble doctrines of Zoroastrianism, brought by the Jewish doctors to Alexandria and associated with the outstanding aspect of their own religious traditions and with the essence of Neo Platonism, together with some influences coming from the cults of Syria and Egypt. Innumerable Gnostic communities sprang up over the whole eastern Mediterranean basin, and their influence over the gradual crystallization of Christian religious thought and practice was great. It was exercised both directly in helping to purify and clarify some of the early Christian concepts and also indirectly by the reactions it induced against some of its tenets, reactions which helped Christians to better appreciate and understand their own doctrines.

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Together with their tendency to consider all religious teachings as allegories, Gnostics, with few infamous exceptions, had a marked propensity to a more austere and ascetic life than the average Christian communities. This otherworldliness contributed to an atmosphere of religious fervour favourable to mysticism.

One of the features of Gnosticism was its condemnation of the parts of the Old Testament which are not compatible with the pure and noble teachings of Jesus. Cerdan, Marcian, Tatian, Ptolemæus and other Gnostic doctors, considered the God of the Jewish Bible not as the Absolute and Supreme Deity, but as an inferior God or Demiurge, who was not capable of creating a perfect universe. They saw a proof of his limitations in the existence of evil and in the fall of man which he could have foreseen, if he had been wise and could have prevented had he been good and powerful.

The Supreme God, the Pater Omnipotens, moved by the suffering of the creatures of the clumsy demiurge, took the human form of Jesus to bring them salvation with another God and a purer and more ethical doctrine. The Gnostic tendency to consider scriptures as allegories influenced some of the church fathers, as is evidenced by Origen who accepted the miracle of the wedding feast of Cana as an allegory "Before Jesus, the scriptures were really water, since His coming it has become as wine for us."

Some of the Gnostics like Marcian, went further, teaching that according to Jesus himself, the Apostles did not receive the full truth which they were incapable of bearing, even after the Pentecost. Their lack of spiritual vision was demonstrated by their faith in Chiliasm, a materialistic belief in the immediate return of Christ upon this earth to establish an earthly Paradise for the exclusive benefit of contemporary Christians. Marcian held that the failure of the Apostles to rise above a materialistic understanding of the current beliefs of the Jews, rendered it necessary for all

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intelligent Christians to strive to attain a deeper and truer vision of the revelations of the Eon Christos, who by His incarnating sacrifice brought a new dispensation enabling men to rise above the terrestrial soul, Psyche to partake of Pneuma, the Divine Spirit.

Under the influence of Persian traditions Gnostics attached a great importance to angelic hierarchies and to their world of mystical light, intermediary between the Transcendent Causeless Cause and the world of concrete forms and bodies.

Making a sharp distinction in the vein of Paul, between the world of the Fall, created by the inferior Demiurge of the Bible and the splendour of the universe engendered by the Spirit, the Gnostics were strongly opposed to the belief in the resurrection of the flesh. They considered it as a travesty, misunderstanding the transcendence of the Spirit and of His presence in the upper soul of man to whom he imparted an immortality to be fully enjoyed, as the soul freed herself from the thralldom of the fleshy body. They considered the flesh as inimical to divine realization according to many teachings of Christ. "My kingdom is not of this world". "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth". "Seek ye first the kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness" etc.

Many Gnostics insisted on the necessity for the followers of the pure and luminous Eon Christ, to exercise the strictest censorship not only over their acts but also on their thoughts. Valentinian said in a passage preserved by St. Clement: "Only One is good, whose presence is manifested by the Son. It is by Him alone that the heart may become pure, all evil spirits having been expelled from it. As a multitude of spirits dwelling in him prevent him from purifying himself, each one producing effects belonging to his nature, they ill-treat the soul in various ways corresponding to their evil desires and it seems to me that it is done unto the soul as unto a hostelry. When ill bred people inhabit



it, they pierce the wall, dig holes in the ground to fill them with refuse. They have no regard for the place since it belongs to another. The same applies to the neglected soul. It remains sullied and is the dwelling of a host of devils; but when the Father, the only Good One, takes heed of her, she is sanctified, she is resplendent with light. Thus the man whose heart is in this condition is happy, for he shall see God."

Consequently, most Gnostic schools enjoined a strict ascetic discipline on their followers. The widely spread Marcianites banned all public spectacles and worldly amusements. While urging a vigilant purification of the mind, they also condemned bodily gratifications including the use of flesh as food. They allowed only those aliments which were quoted by the Bible, water, bread, milk, honey, grapes and oil, and even condemned marital relations as conducive to the fall of souls in the world of matter.

Although these extreme views were vigorously opposed by the Christian churches, there is no doubt that the close relations between Christian groups and the Para-Christian sects among whom they lived tended to colour the religious atmosphere of early Christianity. All available indications show that in the first Christian centuries, many seeking souls were going from belief to belief until they could find one which completely suited them. The Confessions of St. Augustine give us the picture of numbers of Literati seeking an ultimate truth among all doctrines (Conf. IX). This intercourse between Christian and semi-Christian, or even Pagan communities was not all one way. This is proven by the admonitions of Church fathers urging converts to break completely with their former religious milieu, "You cannot drink out of the cup of the Lord and out of the cup of the demons" (St. Paul Cor. ) and Tertullian regretted that "even our houses are not without idols".

We have also the exhortations of early Bishops warning their faithful to be true to Christian loyalties. Three great

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pastors, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, and St. Cesarius of Arles went so far as to promise Christian women who, in case of grave diseases of their dear ones would resist the temptation to resort to Pagan doctors, that they would rank among the martyrs if their loved ones should die. These interconfessional wanderings continued until the very end of the Pagan world. This is shown by three decrees of increasing severity inscribed in the Code of Valentinius, between 381 and 396, punishing those who after their Christian baptism, returned to idolatry. Thirty years later, the confirmation of those decrees by Valentinius the III, proved the hold of old beliefs on many Christians.

Consequently it seems likely that both because of its considerable extension over all the Greco-Roman empire, and because of the marked other-worldly quality of some of its doctrines, Gnosticism played an important part among the historical factors which influenced the early development of Christian mysticism. Among other things it emphasized the distinction between the Old and the New Testament, and led thoughtful and pious souls to adopt a less worldly and more spiritual attitude. This was bound to increase spiritual tendencies, especially with the emphasis laid by Gnostics on the radiant world of the Angels, and on the luminous transcendence of the three tetrads of their Divine Pleuroma.

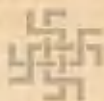
This very superficial summary gives us a general idea of the contribution made by the Hebrew and Greek religions and their joint offshoot of Gnosticism, to the climate in which Christianity had to develop. Christian mystics found in it both a fund of readymade representations for the interpretation of their experiences, and a tone of general fervour favourable to the development of their mystical quest. In particular the relationship between stoicism and Christian asceticism has been often stressed.

Yet it would be a grave mistake to consider Christian mysticism as being merely a new branch of the historical

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development of the hoary tree of Greco-Oriental religiosity.

Not only, as the Gnostics themselves pointed out, did the Christian view of Redemption and Grace provide theological elements new to the Western world, but nascent Christianity was endowed with a most powerful uplifting force. The spiritual enthusiasm imparted by the "glad tidings", the tremendous tradition of the personal contacts of the apostles with Jesus, and the soul stirring persecutions of the first centuries, joined to produce a marvellous crop of Christian mystics. Their personal experiences brought a rich harvest of original material for Christian mystical Theology.



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## LECTURE VI

### *The Mystical Apotheosis of Christianity*

A SURVEY of the historical development of Christian mystical literature is very enlightening. Not only does it display a wonderful array of spiritual documents of the highest value, but it also brings into evidence one of the most important facts concerning the mystical life.

To use Professor Whitehead's terminology: if there actually exists a Reality which everlasting IS, above the universal process of historical becoming, and if there exists in man a faculty to achieve consciousness of this everlasting reality, the data of this consciousness should assume a general uniformity all through the ages. This is exactly what the historical development of Christian mysticism discloses. It might be argued that this uniformity is precisely an example of the preforming influences of early religious education, but this uniformity extends not only to figured descriptions, but also to those of the non-figured experiences.

While there are minor differences in the works of mystographs, due mainly to the evolution of style and literary forms, there is a remarkable uniformity in the general tenor of the accounts of the experiences of our mystics from the very beginning to our day. Not only is there no trace of progress in the development of the mystical faculty in the course of time but if anything it seems that its most brilliant period was at the beginning of the Christian era.

The first centuries witnessed a development of spiritual dedication, asceticism and monastic life such as we have not seen since. Even before the end of the fourth century the Eastern Mediterranean countries were covered by innumerable monasteries in which literally hundreds of thousands of

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monks followed the mystic way. In Syria, in Egypt, in Mesopotamia, there arose a veritable legion of mystics, many of whom have left remarkable and most enlightening documents. Indeed the spiritual brilliancy and the mystical activity of the first centuries was so intense that the numerous mystics of early Christianity have treated adequately most of the aspects of mystical theology and practice. Nearly all later authors have done little more than restate what they said, in that splendid era of ardent faith and zeal. This is widely acknowledged. As Dean Inge has said: "Speculation among the Syrian monks of the third, fourth and fifth centuries was perhaps more unfettered and more audacious than in any other branch of Christendom at any other time" (Christ. Myst. 102). It would be unnecessary to devote much attention to Christian mystical writers after the sixth century were it not for the fact that if they merely restate the data of their forerunners, they do so in a language nearer ours and their experiences took place in worldly surroundings so close to ours that they seem to be almost our contemporaries. But on close examination we shall perceive in them the living influence of the early fathers. Thus their works are of an extraordinary interest. It seems as if their proximity to the passage of Jesus upon our earth has endowed them with an everlasting freshness and import and it is much to our regret that we have to restrict ourselves to a very short survey of a few of the most prominent.

Besides the prevailing atmosphere of the pagan world, rife with mystical fervour, early Christians found a powerful incentive to mystical endeavour in the scriptures. The "Glad tidings" were not only rich with an assurance of redemption, they also sounded many a call to eager souls to take the mystical short-cut to God. "The kingdom of Heaven is within you". "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." "Whosoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall surrender his life shall preserve it."

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"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

The whole gospel of St. John is a powerful incentive to spiritual dedication. "It is the spirit that vivifies, the flesh profiteth nothing." "Thus we know that we are abiding in Him and He in us because He has given us of His spirit", (IV 13). "If a man loves me, he will observe my commandments and I shall come in him and establish my abode in him." (XIV, 23).

St. John definitely promises that Christians shall establish inward contact with God. "He will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind." (XIV, 26), "Behold I stand at the gate and knock, if any man shall hear my voice and open to me, I will come in unto him, and I will sup with him and he with Me." (Apo. III.)

For John, Christ, the word is at the same time the agent of creation and of its perpetuation. "That which has come into existence was life in Him. By Him all things are made."

The permanent presence of Christ, the Word, in the hearts of men, as in all things, is not only a promise of redemption after death, but of actual inclusion in the continuous realization of the Eternal Now. "We are in Him that is true, even Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." This sense of "being in Christ" even now, is the message of the Johannine Gospel and one sees easily why Origen said "No one can understand the Gospel of John unless he has lain upon the breast of Jesus."

St. Paul made also a most important contribution to the foundation of asceticism and mysticism. His whole message is an exhortation to live up to the fact of the intimate union with Christ which has been established at baptism. A conflict is waged in man between his two natures, the body and his earthly appetites and the spiritual nature, the *Nous* of philosophy. But while the Stoics were waging an almost desperate war against fleshly urges, Christians had received a most marvellous power to resist evil. Baptism has brought



them not only the Holy Ghost but even the beautiful gift of actual inclusion in Christ. "The Christian has become grafted on Christ, our old man has been crucified with Him, so that the body of sin may be destroyed, in order that we may no longer be slaves to sin." (R, IV, 5-6). "The Temple of God is holy which you are." (I Cor., III, 17). "Know you not that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (I Cor., III, 18). Paul summed up his teaching of mystical union by saying in the vein of pure Advaitism "Christ is all and in all." (Col. III, 2). His influence for the promotion of mystical practice was enhanced by the fact that he was a practical mystic. Not only did he have the tremendous experience on the road to Damascus, but he stated in self-defense against the Corinthian Christians who clung to Judaism: "Must one glorify oneself? Is it useful? Yet I shall refer to some visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago was ravished to the third heaven, (If it was in his body I do not know, if it was outside of his body, I do not know, God knows) and I know that this man was taken into Paradise; if it was in his body or without his body, I do not know, God knows it, and heard some ineffable words which it is not permitted to a man to reveal." (II Cor. XII, 1-4).

This majestic reality was indeed transcending earthly experience: "The eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has the heart of man received the things that God has prepared for those who love Him, but God has revealed them to us through His Spirit (Cor. II). And this presence of the operation of the Spirit in us, this activation of the Grace received at baptism will raise man to mystical union. All of us who with an open countenance, contemplate the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are formed in this same image, from glory to glory, even as through the Spirit of the Lord." (Eph, III.)

Through the spiritual presence of Christ in their heart,

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Christians can be lifted up to the world of spiritual glory, above the limitations of the material universe subjected to the strait injunctions of the Mosaic law, dealing with the contingent world of the Fall. Therefore, Paul urges Christians to rise above worldliness which binds them to the obsolete trammel of material causality. "As many of you under the works of the Law are under the curse." (Gal. III.) Christians should consequently forsake all earthly motives. "If the spirit is your motive power, you are no longer under the law." (Gal. V, 18) It is the glorious destiny of Christians to rise above worldly pursuits in order to reap a harvest of spiritual and mystical treasures. "You have been made dead to the Law, by the body of Christ, in order that you might become the property of another, namely of Him who is risen from the dead, that you might bring forth fruit unto God." (Rom. VII, 4)

And in a sentence which is the condemnation of the partisans of a worldly religion the Apostle adds, in a paraphrase of the parable of Martha and Mary: "If you seek to be justified by the law, you are excluded from Christ, you are fallen away from Grace." (Gal. V)

St. Paul also stressed the classical difference between the universal and transcendent Spirit, the *Nous* of the Greeks, and the soul, *Psyche*, which while in contact with Spirit, can yet be engrossed in the sensory life of the world of matter.

St. Clement was the first great doctor, and very much under the influence of Greek philosophy which he helped to incorporate into Christian mystical theology. He held up the ideal of Christian perfection, consisting of the knowledge of God and of resemblance to God. It was to be attained through *Apatheia*, the cathartic control of passions, and love. Through *Apatheia*, the soul in complete serenity "is lifted on a tranquil throne from which it beholds God above." From this serene vision, man is lifted to God by the virtue of love: "For in the measure that a man loves

God, he penetrates further into the inner sanctuaries of the Lord". And St. Clement describes the glory of contemplation: "These Gnostic souls are carried away by the splendour of the Vision, and being recognized as holy among the holy, and ravished, they reach the highest of all regions, and there, they do not receive the divine Vision as on a mirror, but with a loving heart, they enjoy eternally this pure, radiantly clear and boundless vision, enjoying unalloyed felicity for ages without end. This is the apprehensive vision of pure heart, and it is the work of the accomplished gnostic to have intercourse with God; as much as possible becoming like unto the Lord" (Strom. VII, 3).

In the same strain, Origen, his disciple, taught the way to mystical union: "God . . . is perfect Goodness, and man can become like unto God by learning to know Him through the realization of the presence of the word in his heart through purity and Apatheia." All men can attain to illumination, since they all owe their existence to the operation of the Divine Cause of life, present in the core of their soul; "There is a certain divine emanation instilled into the hearts of all men without exception, but it penetrates particularly the hearts of those who spend their time in meditation . . . The sun itself would reveal the true God to us . . . the creating word who is the sun of the soul is capable of this for Him . . . through Him alone, when His rays shine in the deepest recesses of consciousness, the eyes of the soul are illumined." (Protrepticus. VI) Origen proposing to the students of the Didascalee, which he led after the death of St. Clement, not the ideal of a Gnostic philosopher but that of an ascetic, laid the ground work for the great movement for asceticism and mysticism which was to sweep over Christendom.

His follower St. Basil left some rules which have become the pattern of many monastic regulations. He insisted, not only on the control of sensory attractions but even of intellectual operations which must be transcended in order



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to open the way to higher vision : For as the senses perceive objects accessible to them, intelligence is able to grasp intelligible objects. Intelligence, hampered by fleshly bondage and filled with its own phantasies, needs the help of faith and virtue; and then it is able to make of its feet the feet of the heart and set them on the high places". (Epis. Apol. ad Caesarienses.)

Yet, the stilling of the intellectual phantasmagories was not sufficient, and man had to receive the divine help of grace without which souls would be unable to bridge over the chasm separating creatures from the Creator. But, "with His help, hearts are uplifted, the weak are heartened, and the striving ones led to perfection . . . in the same way that brilliant and transparent objects in contact with a ray of light become themselves translucent, emitting new rays, these souls in which the Divine Spirit abides, being illuminated by Him, become spiritual themselves and transmit their grace to others. Hence come . . . their understanding of hidden things, their shedding of beneficent gifts, their ascent to heaven, unto the Angelic choirs. Then they enter eternal felicity, they abide in God, are fashioned into His likeness, and, what is above everything, become God." (De spiritu-santo. IX,233)

With regret, we must leave many beautiful contributions of the older mystics to pass to the two most important authors, who have transmitted to following generations the gist of the spiritual harvest of Christian antiquity, the great St. Augustine and the more specifically mystical Dionysius, the Areopagite.

With his early grounding first in the dualism of the Manicheans, then in the monism of the Neoplatonists, Augustine was well prepared to bring to Christian Theology the contribution of Philosophy as well as that of his own mystical experience. This experience enabled him to preserve a sense of the Divine Reality which is the corner-stone of the mystical quest and which he most eloquently formulated: "Why

should I desire that Thou should come to me who would not exist if Thou were not in me? Consequently, I would not be, O my God, I would not exist at all if Thou were not in me. Or rather, I would not be if I were not in Thee, of whom are all things, from whom are all things, in whom are all things. Whence could I come to Thee, since I am in Thee? or Whence couldst Thou come to me? For where could I go outside heaven and earth for Thee to come there, O Thou my God who said "I fill Heaven and Earth." God is the Invisible One, from whom, as Creator and first Cause, all visible things receive their being. He is the One, Supreme, Eternal, Immutable; comprehensible for nobody but Himself, endowed with supreme majesty, sanctified and sanctifier of all that has been sanctified". (Epist. C. C. XXXII. Madar.)

Yet if Augustine acknowledged, and even worshipped the presence of God in all Creation, he was not a Pantheist. One of his main contributions has been precisely to clarify the two connected problems of the relation of God with the world and the nature and the necessity of Grace.

Like the Hindus, most Greek Philosophers had professed some form of immanentism, holding that the creator of the Cosmos, whether he was the Logos, or some Demiurge, remained immanently present in the creatures of the universe whether under the guise of the Rhizomata or root of being of Empedocles, of the Spermata or seeds of Anaxagoras, or the Reason, or Logos of Democritus. But Socrates and Plato, opposing ideas to matter, held a sort of dualism, leaving little relation between the gross world of matter and the subtle real world of Ideas moulding and forming beings. Aristotle saw the reality of beings not in an ideal form, but in the force which in each individual actualises his potential essence. But in the materiality of bodies there was a latent capacity to recognize the attraction, the lovable of the "Sovereign Good", God. "The Immobile Motor of the Universe" who brings about the fulfilment of the

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Law in the Cosmos through the attraction felt for Him by the energies latent in matter.

This view gave rise to the idea of the Stoics, holding that God was the Seminal Reason of the world, all beings resulting from the play upon matter of one of the particular seminal Reasons, *Logoi spermatikoi*, or animating souls, through which God carries out His work in the world. For St. Clement, the yearning of the soul for union with God was due to the presence of these "Seeds of the Logos."

St. Augustine achieved a synthesis of these competing views in a concept which was to provide the corner-stone of the *Summa* of St. Thomas on the subject. Following Plato, he holds that the world contains an eternal vision of creation in all its details, the Ideas, patterns of things to be. To explain the operation of these subtle ideas on the forms of the gross world, he calls upon a world of celestial entities, intermediaries between the Divine Will, or Ideal plane of the cosmos, and the seminal reasons incarnate in the souls of individuals. These seminal reasons are either of a natural or supernatural sort according to whether they rule the body or the soul.

The presence in our souls of these seminal reasons echoes of their divine origin in the Causal Logos, is the cause of our love for the divine attributes, beauty, truth and good, as well as the source of our love for God Himself. Thus while God is really transcendent in regard to human nature, there is in the soul an abiding direct emanation of his effulgence in the causal seeds. This becomes known to the soul through the "Grace of the initial gift of faith, *Initium Fidei*, a seminal reason which brings the soul to realize both its divine origin and its relation to God. This provided St. Thomas with the theological explanation of the operation of mystical experience.

It also accounts for the doctrine of the necessity of grace to attain salvation. Without these supernatural seminal reasons, the soul would have no incentive to rise above the



urges of the flesh and the lures of the world.

But if these divine seeds are in the soul, it is as gifts of the Lord and not as part of its organism, and salvation is impossible to unaided nature. Augustine reconciled the conflicting theories of salvation; that of the Pelagians, who held that man could reach salvation by his own power, and that which contended that he was completely powerless without the help of grace, a view held later by many Reformers. Augustine taught that if man could not be saved without grace he could secure this "Beautiful gift", this eucharism, through prayer. It is true that even the desire to pray for grace was induced in man's heart by another grace of God. But this did not lead to a fatalistic quietism since men had to cooperate to their salvation by a life of prayer and virtue.

The earthly ideal assigned to Christians is that of "Christian Perfection" which is a life of perfect justice. A man is "Just in the Eternal" when his will is so completely submitted to that of the Lord that he can no longer err nor sin.

This "Perfect Justice" is almost identical with the Hindu ideal of the Jivanmukti, the completely selfless devotee who has reached such an integration of his practice of life in the orderly unfoldment of the divine purpose, that he ceases to create Karma, i. e. interference with the pattern of the Cosmic becoming. It is also suggestive of the similar idea of Yoga, divine Union to be reached through "skill in action."

According to Augustine, the foundation of mystical progress lies in the successive mastery and purification of the seven modes of activity of the soul, on the seven planes upon which it is called to function, as in the theory of the Platonists.

The three lower degrees dealt with the purification of the body, of the sentiments and of the mind. Not only were the impulsions of the body and feelings to be held in

check but even the mind had to be restrained lest it carry man into false ideas of God. "When thou thinkest of God, if a sensory and corporeal representation (of God) comes to thy mind, chase it, repulse it, negate it, despise it, drive it away, flee from it." Thus for him also, the Infinite is above definition.

Virtue, is the fourth degree. After the conquest of the lower passions and mental habits, the soul has now to forsake all forms of pride, riches, ambition, and power, increasing in humility and love of God. With this fourth degree, the catharsis or cleansing of the soul is attained.

The fifth is Tranquillity, the Apatheia of philosophy. In the stillness of the passions, the love of God completely controls the soul, which, being released from worldly ties, soon reaches the sixth degree "Entry into the light". Here the soul perceives the glorious light which is as the halo of the Divine Nearness. These fifth and sixth stations correspond to the "Via Illuminativa."

In the seventh degree, the soul establishes its abode or mansion in the "House of the Lord" wherein is enjoyed the "Contemplation and vision of truth" (*Contemplatio et visio veritatis*). "And this contemplation is a source of undescribable felicities; What are the joys of the soul? What is its enjoyment of the sovereign and only good? What is the breath of this eternal serenity? What could I tell of them?" (*De Quantitate Anima*).

Yet the saint gives us in his confessions an inkling of his vision of the Ineffable: "What is this which flashes in upon me and thrills my heart without wounding it? I tremble and I burn feeling I am like Him" (XI) and further, "I entered and beheld with the mysterious eye of my soul the light that never changes, above the eye of my soul, above my intelligence. It was something altogether different from any earthly illumination. It was higher than my intelligence because made by It. He who knows the truth knows that light, and he who knows that light knows eternity. Love knows that light." (*Conf. VII*)

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The mysterious writer who wrote under the name of the first bishop of Athens, Dionysius the Areopagite, was to exercise an even greater influence on Christian mystical theology, an influence so great on medieval writers that it was only second to that of Holy Writ.

His cosmic conception is based on Plotinus. All beings flow from God and are returning to Him. The first hypostasis is the Son, the Logos of St. John, from whom proceeds the multiplicity of the universe. All beings are one in God, yet preserve their individuality. The evolutionary process is accomplished by a sublimation in which beings return to God by transcending their personal limitations, enabling their awareness to soar to the level of the higher soul to enter the "darkness of nescience", which is union beyond the intelligible world.

According to Plato's idea of transcendence and in keeping with orthodox theology, God is not to be identified with the Universe: "Being is in Him, but He is not in being" (De div. Nam)

God, transcending the limitations of any form, can not be known by the mind and his image-forming representations. Only abstract Reason, Logos, and mystical contemplation can lead us to some measure of understanding of the divine nature. Systematized rational study of the divine gives rise to apodictic theology, and the supernatural intuition of God is formulated in mystical theology. Yet, even its descriptions are bound to be inadequate for "God is unnamable, anonymous and unknowable (Agnostos). By reason, we know the divine in its effects only, but to tell of what he is in Himself this is beyond all understanding. When we name this mysterious ocean of being God, Life, Substance, Light or word, we do not conceive anything beyond the graces which are coming to us, those from and through which, deification, existence, life and wisdom are imparted to us; but, as to Him, we only reach Him through the full repose of our understanding faculties, perceiving



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no longer either God, or deification, or life, or substance which could bear exact comparison with this first cause, supremely exalted above all". (De Div. Nam.)

Contemplation is a gift of God, but it can be prepared by prayer and purification. The process of purification is threefold: detachment from wordly objects, detachment from sensuousness, detachment from images of the mind.

Like St. Augustine, Dionysius describes three degrees in contemplation: First comes, Entry of the soul in Divine Darkness, the inaccessible lights in which God lives according to Scriptures, (Tim, VI, 16). Then follows the Mystical: silence, the control of evil powers of the soul. Finally access is gained to the Vision of God and union with Him, in which, the soul although absorbed in God does not lose its personality, which makes of Dionysius a distinct forerunner of the Aristotelian individualism which was to be taught by St. Thomas.

Union with God is described in a way reminiscent of the Hindu and Platonist theory of plurality of souls. "It is in the supreme part of the soul that the mystical operation takes place. To that portion of the soul which no passion can reach, is to be assigned the contemplation of the pure and profound verities", Union with God is salvation. Alluding to Jesus' promise that saved souls will be at the right of the Father, He says: "Those who are being saved are being deified. Now the assimilation by union with God is deification". (Ecclesiast. hierar.)

Dionysius comes very near the Hindu ideas that reality is beyond being and non-being and also that the highest form of consciousness is void of any perception. "And thou, dear Timothy, in thy intent practice of mystical meditation, leave behind both thy senses and thy intellectual operations and all things known by senses and intellect, and all things which are not and which are, and set thyself as far as may be, to commune in unknowing with Him who is above all beings and knowledge, for by being purely free and ab-

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solute, out of self and of all things, thou shalt be led up to the ray of Divine Darkness, stripped of all and loose from all."

These views, really sublime in the etymological sense, have inspired all the great Catholic and Protestant mystical authors to our own time, we might end with them our survey of Christian mysticism. Yet the great Spanish mystics exercised such an influence that we feel constrained to resort to their works to complete our survey of the atmosphere in which Christian mysticism is evolving.

We must introduce our reference to Spanish mysticism by a remark on the contribution of the Moslem mystics of the Iberian peninsula. They enriched Christian thinkers with the profound views of Aristotle on the value of individuality as the indispensable medium of creation, and provided a powerful incentive to the great mystical revival of the Lowlands and Rhineland, with Eckhart and his disciples, Ruysbroek, Tauler, Suso, as well as to the movement of the Spanish Alumbrados, and later on to the glorious schools of Ignatian and Carmelite mysticism. The Carmelites were graced by the presence in their order of two of the greatest mystical authors of all time, Santa Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

Although faithfully abiding by the official doctrines of the necessity of grace to obtain contemplation, Santa Teresa claims that all are called to it if they only follow the necessary discipline "Remember that the Lord invites all.....He says without restriction: come ye all. I hold it for certain that all those who will not tarry on the way shall receive this quickening water."

In describing her mystical experience, she compares the soul to a garden which is watered with an abundance corresponding to the influx of grace. The soul is constituted by seven successive degrees or mansions. The three lower ones are the physical, sentimental and mental natures in which the soul functions in ordinary consciousness in the pursuit of worldly activities.

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Her four degrees of orison correspond to the four higher mansions. She draws a sharp distinction between the first orison acquired in intellectual effort by man's merits alone and the three higher ones which are the result of the blessings of grace. To describe the fundamental difference of the two processes the saint says: "To understand this, let us visualize two fountains whose basins are being filled with water . . . in a different way. One receives water from a great distance through long aqueducts built with great effort. The other is built on a spring and is being filled without noise. The water brought by canal represents the consolations acquired in meditation. We bring them about by our reflection . . . through a painful effort of our understanding. In the other fountain, the water springs directly from the source which is God."

The scanty blessings received in the first orison are compared to the desultory watering of a garden with water hoisted by hand from a deep well.

This is the orison of stillness, and although originating in intellectual meditation it can only be attained when the will surrenders quietly to God, without obliterating forcefully the mind and senses but ignoring them.

The next orison, the orison of quietude or of Divine taste is reached also in the fourth mansion. The more abundant blessings received evoke the watering of the garden by means of a wheel of buckets moved by a handle, an indication that man's efforts are supplemented by a measure of grace. Santa Teresa describes those gifts: "Then all the powers are at rest, and the soul by a process of understanding very different from the one which comes from external senses, understands that she is very near her God, and, but for very little could become one with Him through union.

..... In a very manifest way a distinct enlargement is produced in the soul. Imagine a spring which has no outlet and whose basin is built in such a way that it is enlarged as the volume of water grows.....As the soul has experienced the



bliss coming from God, the pleasures of the world become no more than dung in her eyes."

The third orison, or orison of union, corresponds to the watering of the garden by an abundant rain, and takes place in the fifth mansion. The mind has become completely obliterated. "Here one no longer senses anything, one does nothing but enjoy, without knowing what it is that is enjoyed. .... All senses are so much absorbed in this bliss that none has any freedom to deal with something else, inwardly or outwardly ... .. At last one is entirely dead to the world to live increasingly in God. It is a delightful death .... because if the soul seems really to part from the body, it is the better to be united to God." Here the saint makes a very enlightening admission.

In accordance with a prevailing doctrine which found a strong expression in the exercises of St. Ignatius, she obediently declared that the contemplation of the divine humanity of Christ was the necessary door to union. But she admits that even this exalted idea disappears when higher consciousness is attained. "When it pleases God to suspend all the powers of the soul, .... it is evident that against our wishes, this presence of the Holy Humanity escapes us." This struggle between actual experience and the desire to read into it a commendable context is one of the main difficulties in the interpretation of transcendent experiences. The following account is a good illumination of it: "As I was in orison on the feast day of the glorious St. Peter, I saw near me, or rather I felt, since I saw nothing with the eyes of the body nor of the soul, it seemed to me thus that I saw Jesus Christ near me. I understood at the same time that it was He whom I thought I was hearing speaking to me. It seemed Jesus was ever standing at my side, yet the vision was imageless, I did not see under what form. But that He was ever on my right side, I felt perfectly. He witnessed all my actions, and as long as I was holding myself in concentration, and was not too distracted, I could not ignore His presence near me."

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It would be difficult to find a better example of the difference between the pure mystical experience and the efforts of the mystic to translate it in terms of the patterns of his theology as for instance St. Teresa does when she says she saw in a clear vision the Dove of the Holy Ghost. Yet in other moods, she realized the inadequacy of any representation. "It has happened to me to receive the knowledge of the most sublime secrets . . . . These were such marvels that the least of them was enough to plunge my soul in admiration and make her advance much in the oblivion of, and contempt for, the things of the earth. I would like to give an idea of the least high of that knowledge, but . . . . I see that it is impossible."

The sixth mansion is the seat of some visions and experiences but mostly of painful trials for the soul struggling with the death to worldly attachments which is necessary to prepare it for the supreme experience of the seventh mansion, the orison or union of Spiritual Wedding.

This is different from all visions where the senses or imagination had any part: "The Lord appears in the centre of the soul without imaginative vision, but by an intellectual vision even more delicate than the one I mentioned, and in the same way that he appeared to his Apostles without passing through doors, when He said unto them "Pax vobis". In that instant, the Lord deigns to render manifest the heavenly beatitude, in a mode the sublimity of which surpasses that of all visions and of all spiritual tastes."

Yet, however sublime these pure felicities, Santa Teresa in conformity with the confirmed conclusion of all mystical schools, down from the Jivan mukti ideal of the old Aryan seers, holds that the culminating point of perfection consists not in contemplation, but in complete relinquishment of personal aims. "The supreme perfection does not consist in the inner consolations, nor in sublime ravishments, nor in visions, nor in the spirit of prophecy. It consists in reducing our will to such conformity to that of God, that as soon

as we understand that a thing is willed by Him, we attach ourselves to it with all our willpower; finally to receive with an equal delight that which is sweet and that which is bitter."

A disciple of Santa Teresa, St. John of the Cross, was to complete her teaching, in his works which constitute the culminating peak of Christian mystical literature. He was outstanding in his denunciation of engrossment in any kind of imaginative or intellectual construction. In complete opposition to the visualizing exercises of St. Ignatius, he said: "I declare that all imaginary visions or perceptions, all perceptible forms or species conveyed through figure, image, or even whatever knowledge of a particular nature, whether considered as false and coming from the demon, or as true and coming from God, should neither occupy nor nurture understanding. The soul shall not desire their communication, nor retain them when they come, so that she can keep herself free, unencumbered, pure and simple, without mode or manner, as is required for Divine Union." One could not wish for a better illustration of the mystical condemnation of literal dogmatism.

Understanding is powerless to comprehend God. It is absolutely unequal to this sublime object. "It is true that all creatures have a given relationship with God and are marked with a divine imprint...according to the measure of their excellence, but between them and God, there is no connection, no essential likeness...the distance separating the Divine Being from a created being is infinite. Hence the impossibility of our understanding to penetrate into God through the medium of creatures whether celestial or terrestrial."

Repeatedly St. John warns against the insidious suggestions of the imaginative faculty ever trying to deceive the soul in accepting as realities its fleeting constructions. Echoing the preoccupations of the Inquisitors in their war against false spiritual experiences, he wrote: "It is possible



and often happens that spiritual persons are supernaturally affected by representations and objects sensorily perceived. Sight is affected by visions, by persons from another life, visions of Saints, visions of good or bad angels, extraordinary light and radiance. The ear hears some strange words, either uttered by persons who are seen or without apparitions, smell registers suave fragrances without perceptible source. Taste can also be affected by very caressing flavours and touch by deep delight. These are sometimes so strong that the marrow and bones seem to unfold and bathe in delight. . . . Although there is a possibility that these phenomena may be coming from God . . . in no case should one accept them complacently. I would go further. they should be absolutely rejected without seeking to know whether their origin is good or bad. Because of the very fact that these communications are chiefly external and physical, the presumption is always that their origin is not divine," and further he asserts that all definite visions or meditations "are a source of obstacles and danger to the soul, and if one does not stop them, one is drawing away from the means of union with God" (*Ascent to Car. II* Ch 10).

Consequently as soon as the first steps have been taken on the *Via Mystica*, intellectual meditation must be discarded, so that the mind may be darkened by the "deep night of the soul", opening the way for the perception of the supersensory and super mental contemplation. St. John describes three successive nights, corresponding to the three theological virtues; the night of faith, reached through the silencing of understanding; the night of hope brought about by the silencing of memory; and the night of love, reached by silencing the will through love. In this remarkable analysis of mystical conditions, the highest expression of Western mysticism reaches the same exalted peaks of abstraction as those already scaled by Eastern mysticism. St. John of the Cross is here very close to the *Maya* theory of India

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and to the Sunyata of Buddhism, while elucidating the saying of Jesus that the "Letter killeth" and that to be saved men had to become as little children.

All memories of impressions received through the senses must be forgotten to allow the soul to aspire freely to God, "so that there shall remain no imprint in her, for her to remain as spotless and as void as possible, as if nothing had ever passed through her, in the complete oblivion of anything." And in the quest of the night of Hope, he further stresses the value of the inner void. "It is in the measure that memory is discarded by the soul and all forms and remembrances which are not of God are being cast out, that she shall best succeed in putting herself into God; and will have made available the greatest void in the hope that God shall fill it completely.

Thus in order to live in pure and complete hope of God, one must not put up with knowledge of distinct forms and images. Every time they turn up, one must immediately turn to God, the soul emptied of all this, in a surge of tender affection." (Asc.t. Carm.3.chi) When the night of the senses has been achieved by the silencing of the three powers attributed by theology to the soul, understanding, memory and will, the first part of the mystic way, active contemplation is reached.

The doctrine of the Catholic church is that this active contemplation is opened to all men with the simple help of ordinary graces if they make the effort necessary to open themselves to the operation of these graces.

On the contrary, to achieve the supreme Divine Union, in passive contemplation, the soul must receive an infused Grace from the Holy Ghost, which is only granted to a few elect ones. It helps man to effectuate the passive purifications of the senses and of the soul which will lead to the supreme purification of: "The night of the soul," in which "the Old man" is finally destroyed in what St. John calls "The interior disassimilation". This leads to "Divine Union"

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which takes place in "The heart of the soul", in the culmination of love: "If the soul reaches the supreme degree of love, the love divine shall have struck her in her deepest centre, and it will be for the soul the transformation and illumination of all her being, according to the might and fervour of which she is capable, and even so that she shall seem to be God. She is then like an extremely transparent and pure crystal, struck by light, the more intense the rays of light, and the more the crystal absorbs them and concentrates them in itself and the more it sparkles, and it may even happen that if the light received is superabundant, the crystal itself shall be confounded with it and will not be distinguished from the rays, since it absorbs all it can receive of their clarity and seems to have become light." (Quick flame, 1st stanza.) Thus after the darkness of the night of the soul, its obscure void is filled by the effulgent radiance of the Infinite Spiritual fullness. . . . Here the great Christian mystic emulates the Arhats of the Buddhist Sunyata in their contemplation of the radiant "fullness of the void." This brilliant flight through the interior infinitudes of the purified soul brings to a close our short survey of the development of Christian mystical theology.

We saw how the Christian is called by the graces he received at baptism to wage a triumphant war against the "Old Man" of this world, how the general graces of the Holy Ghost make it possible for all to attain through their own efforts to the blessings of active contemplation, in accordance with all schools of mystical tradition. Above this, the superior form of passive Divine Union can only be attained with help of a special grace coming from the outside "More than self". This again is in accordance with general mystical tradition. The only point of variance is when it is held that only a few, even among Christians, will receive this special grace. Yet we saw how some of the greatest Catholic witnesses felt irresistibly prompted to assert that all souls would be called to mystical union. Even



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if this were not the case, this exclusion would not have a fatal implication since contemplation is not held necessary to salvation.

But, if indeed it is a free gift, the lofty array of great souls who acceded to it within the fold of Christendom, constitute for all pilgrims through the vale of life both the assurance of their inclusion in a fuller world than the one they actually know and an incentive to avail themselves of the methods which have led so many souls to a realization of the pure glory of the living process and of its fathomless origin.



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## LECTURE VII.

### *Islam's Trust in Unity*

#### *Love and Beauty in Sufi Mystical Tradition*

WITH ISLAM we come to the great religion which among all others is nearest to Christianity. While Hinduism and Buddhism evolved in an altogether different atmosphere, Mohammed, the revered prophet of the Moslems, claimed to be a continuer of the prophetic lineage of our Bible. So much so, that Moslems classify themselves together with the Jews and the Christians under the generic name "Ahl el Kitab," the "Peoples of the book." Mohammed claimed that when the Angel Gabriel dictated the Koran to him, at the behest of God, one of the Surates he received read: "God has opened to you the way of religion which He commanded to Noah that he might follow in it. It is the same faith which we have revealed to thee, and which we showed to Abraham and to Jesus to the end that true religion might continue in the Earth. Divide not yourselves into sects." (XLII-33)

The spiritual unity of all "peoples of the book" is expressly stressed in the Koran, "Say ye: We believe in God and in what He has sent from on high, even as we believe in that which was sent to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob and to the tribe of Israel, and in like manner we believe in the revelations vouchsafed to Moses, to Jesus and to the prophets by their Lord. We make no difference between any of these and we ourselves are those who surrender to Him. (II-136)

The reason for a new revelation was that changing times called for a message adapted to new conditions: "To each

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period, its own book, God doeth away with what He will and preserveth what He will." (XIII. 38) Islam teaches universal prophecy, that is, it considers all religions as having been inspired by God and suited to particular needs. "There has been no people without its prophets."

Yet, Moslems have the particular mission of bringing all beliefs to unity: "It is thus that we have made of you, O musulmans, a people destined to be mediators, so that you might bear witness before men of the truths of the Koran, even as the prophet himself is witness of them before you." (II-143)

Yet, as salvation does not depend on any professed opinion, but on a life of virtue and faithfulness to God's commandments, all good men will be saved. "Among the true believers and those who are Jews, Christians or Sabeans, (gentile monotheists), whosoever believes in God, and in the day of the last Judgment and who doeth good, verily he shall find recompense at the feet of his Lord." (II-62)

Thus, were it not for this inclusive catholicity, which some would deem to verge on laxity, and also for its intransigent monotheism which leads to the rejection of the Trinity and of the divinity of Jesus Christ, Islam might be considered as a sort of forerunner of the Protestant reformation. To say the least, the differences separating Christianity from Islam are not any greater than those separating it from Mosaism. At this crucial moment of history, it is more useful to stress the many ties binding Moslems and Christians than to insist on their points of dissension. We see nowadays so many happy instances of collaboration between Christian and Jewish leaders in the defence of democracy and religion against materialism, that there is every reason to wish that collaboration should be extended to include representative Moslems.

The Islamic world constitutes a live and virile spiritual family of 350 million men reaching from Morocco to Manchuria and from Yugoslavia to Timor. Their religion is



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endowed with a simple grandeur. It consists essentially of the most exclusive monotheism, repudiating any possibility of division or association within the divine Reality and drawing the necessary consequences in the field of ethics. The oneness of God is stressed by many Surates of the Koran. "Your God is the one true God, there is no other God beside Him. He is the kind and merciful one." (II-163). In a view which is a basis for mystical conceptions and endeavour, the world is included in Divine consciousness: "He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, the source and the origin. In His knowledge all things are included and contained." (LVII.3)

In keeping with the Plotinian procession and conversion, the universe is emanated from God and returns to its divine origin. "God maketh His creation to proceed from Himself, thereafter to return back again and in the end all returneth to Him, its maker." (XXX-II). The whole universal process takes place in the Divine consciousness: "He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six separate periods, thereafter ordaining the Universe. He is aware of that which boreth in the earth and of that which riseth to the surface, that which cometh down from the sky and that which mounteth up to the heights above. He is with you wheresoever you may be. God is witness of all that ye do." (LVII.4).

Our earth is connected to its divine origin by a series of intermediary planes along which are circulating the instruments of the all-pervading divine will. "It is God who hath created the seven heavens . . . His commands descend from Him and circulate among these various spheres" (LXV-12). Souls are returning to God through the fulfilment of the duties imposed upon them by their respective stations and stages of development, according to a well adapted proportion: "He who is able to distribute largess to others, let him do it with a lavish and generous hand, whilst he who is obliged to count all that he spends, must

provide for others according to his means. God exacteth no more from any of us than He hath already dispensed to each. As our problems arise, He provideth the solution and maketh able for any obstacle." (LXV 12).

To face the trials of life and escape damnation on the day of judgment, man needs God's grace: "Strive ever to obtain the Grace of your Lord and reach forward to Paradise and the blessed life hereafter . . . It is a favour which God accordeth to whomsoever He wills. The grace of God is not limited ; He bestoweth it without measure, and it has no end." (LVII-21).

With the help of Divine Grace, souls reach the resplendent world of the divine light in close proximity to the Most High, and it is interesting to note how closely the description of the inspiring effect of grace as described in the Koran, comes to the figure employed by St. John of the Cross in his "Quick Flame", some ten centuries later. "God Himself is the torch which lighteth up the heavens and the earth. The shining of His light resembles that of an inextinguishable flame which darteth its rays across a fragment of crystal hidden in a niche. Then is this crystal likened to a star set in pearls whose shining proceedeth from a sacred olive tree, a tree which is neither of the East nor of the West. Its oil shineth brightly without the touch of fire and spreadeth light upon light. And God sendeth His light upon whomsoever it pleaseth Him." (XXIV. 35).

Yet, however brilliant this subtle intermediary world connecting the earth to the Creator, however enticing to mystical endeavour, a warning of an august majesty, and reminiscent of the Ecclesiast, reminds us of its utter vanity: "We created the Heavens and the Earth and all that is between them . . . they are unreal." This emphatic stress on the exclusive reality of the One, called by Moslems the doctrines of Unity is the corner-stone of their theology and the inspiration of their religious life. Its practice is of an outstanding simplicity and directness ; it consists of five

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main obligations: The profession of Faith "There is no other God than God, and Mohammed is His prophet" the five daily prayers, the fast of the month of Ramadan the giving of generous alms to the poor; The pilgrimage to Mecca.

Islam puts man in direct presence of the Lord without the necessity of any mediatory sacraments or ministry. A solemn statement of Mohammed said: "The temple of the Lord is His universe. The heart of man is His altar, and every Moslem is a grand Priest." All places are equally holy for the true believer in the actuality of God. "For God is in the East and in the West, so wherever thou turneth thy face, there is the face of God."

This universal presence of the One Reality is stressed repeatedly and forcefully in the Koran: "We are nearer to you than yourself, but you do not observe."

The constant denial of the reality of the world provided an incentive to the mystical quest and to its accompanying asceticism. Moslem Mystics have been called Sufis, probably because of the white robes of coarse wool, or Suf, they were wearing, contrasting with the silk garments of world-lie men.

In keeping with the individual character of mystical experience, Sufism was very widely spread over the Moslem world, and rather sporadic, depending on the emergence of leaders to establish local schools. On the whole one can describe four main regions of Sufism. The western, of Spain and Morocco, the Egypto-Arabic, the Persian, and the Sindhi School of Western India.

Besides the universal intuitive urge to divine union present in all men, Moslems found very definite incentives to mysticism in the countries they overran in their lightning conquests. All over the Near East, from Mesopotamia to Cyrenaica, beyond Egypt, they encountered the brilliant array of Christian Monasticism then in all its ardent vigour. The virtues and intensity of purpose of those holy men



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filled the conquerors with admiration and soon with a wish to emulate them. There are records of the respect of the Moslems for Christian Mystics. When Abu Bakr, was about to invade Syria he made this proclamation to his army; "You will find people who have secluded themselves in cells. Leave them alone for they have secluded themselves for the sake of God." This attitude is further elucidated by a letter of a Nestorian Bishop who wrote in 649: "These Arabs fight not against the Christian religion, nay rather they defend our faith, they revere our priests and saints, and they make gifts to our Churches and monasteries." An early Moslem writer, Al Nabigha preserved an echo of the wonderment they felt before Christian hermits. "A nature is theirs, God gives the like to no other men, a wisdom that never sleeps, a bounty that never fails. Their home is in God's own land. His chosen of old, their faith is steadfast, their hope is set on aught but the world to come."

Intense as was the influence of the Christian example, it was not the only exterior factor which contributed to the intellectual and sentimental atmosphere of early Sufism. The Greek influence was to be even more profound. It came into two stages. First at the time of the conquest of Syria, the Arabs came in contact with the Syrian syncretism, consisting chiefly in the legacy of Hellenism with an admixture of Zoroastrianism through the medium of Manicheism, as well as some other Egyptian and Phenician doctrines. Owing to a recent nationalistic reaction of Syria against decadent Hellenism, the Codex of Syrian syncretism had been translated in Aramean, and the Arabs borrowed their first knowledge of Greek thought from it. Later, when, after the first flush of conquest, they had developed some scholars, they came in direct contact in Egypt with Alexandrian thought. This was to exercise an overwhelming influence over Arabic mystical theology. In particular Plotinus whom they called "El Cheik el Yaonanis" the leader of the Ionians, became the great source of inspiration of Mos-

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lem authors. So much so that a leading Islamologist, Prof. Blochet has seen fit to declare : "The productions of Arabic philosophy are merely a continuation of Alexandrianism." Later when Moslem scholars arrived at a real familiarity with Greek thought, they also absorbed the works of Aristotle which Averroes brought to the knowledge of Western Christianity.

However important the contribution of Greek Philosophy, Sufism had other sources of inspiration. In Persia it came in contact with the mystical views of Iran concerning the Farwashi, the Apex of the soul which if anything is even more spiritual than the Nous and provided a strong urge to mystical endeavour. Hinduism and Buddhism provided also their quota of representations and example. The Atma doctrine of India reinforcing the Tawhid, and the Buddhist Monks met in Iran and Western India, being no less an inspiration than their Christian colleagues. Among other things, Moslems borrowed from Buddhist monks the use of beaded rosaries to count their prayers and transmitted that custom to the Christians in the West of their domain, in a curious instance of transmission of religious forms. Moslem scholars acknowledge the influence of other faiths on their own. Thus Professor Wahed Hosain in the journal of the Department of Literature of Calcutta University, writes, "The Neo-Platonic idea of the Absolute One, the Vedic idea of abstract Monism, the Pantheism of the Upanishads as well as the theory of the Universal soul, Atma, play a great part in the mystic philosophy of the Sufis." In fact some claim that true to the mission of mediators assigned to them by the Koran, Moslems acted as intermediaries between the West and the East. Their scholars took Greek culture to India, while they were revealing Aristotle to the European contemporaries of Eckhart, and Hindu scholars were invited to teach in Samarkand. To use the words of an Indian Moslem, Mohammed Barakatullah, the Islamic world provided a meeting ground in which



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"The Orient and the Occident kissed each other in the medieval times."

But however great their indebtedness to exterior influences, Sufis claim to have found their chief source of inspiration in their own Islamic tradition and scriptures. They assert that the Koran has two meanings, one apparent and simple or *Zahir* and an esoteric and hidden one or *Batin*. The esoteric students are called *Ahl-I Batin*, "The People of the Hidden." Mohammed is reported to have imparted a knowledge of the esoteric truth of the Koran to his nephew Ali who became the patron of Sufis. Some hadiths or glosses of the Prophet are held to vindicate this assertion. "We, the prophets are directed to speak to the people according to their understanding." "Some knowledge is secret, known only to the Gnostics of God."

Regarding the Nature of God and of His relation to creation, which provides the corner stone of Mystical theology, there were three main Sufi schools to interpret the *Tawhid*, the fundamental theory of Divine Unity.

The first conception, very near naive realism, and based on creationism and transcendentalism, is held by the simple people who cannot accept the Koran literally in its *Zahir* sense. They believe that a transcendent God created the world, according to the account of the Biblical genesis, and remained in the unity of His supramundane transcendence. In the words of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Tasanifi: "The simple belief of Moslems is that God is one, He exists in His One Holy Essence. He brought all things from nothingness into thingness. All things are dependent on Him for their existence, He is not dependent on anything. . . . He surrounds everything by His essence, and is near and with everything, but His proximity and his propinquity are not understood by us". This attitude corresponds to the Koranic Surate: "Praised be God who created the heavens and the earth and brought into being the darkness and light". The belief of that school is summed up in the formula: *Hamah az ust*.



"All is from that." This doctrine was accepted by some of the greatest Sufi poets such as Jallal uddin Rumi, and Abder Rahman Jami.

It was opposed by the Pantheistic school of El Arabi, Shams i-Tabriz, Mansur al Hallaj, with the saying "Hamah ust", "All is that" the equivalent of the "Tat twam asi" "Thou art That" of the Vedanta. This Wahidiyyah school of immanentist monism, holds that the single essential Reality has manifested the many out of its own thought. But opinions vary as to the relations between the world and God. While the pantheistic school of the Mutazilites hold that God is immanent in the created universe, more metaphysically minded authors like Arabi, claim that although the whole universe is only an idea in the knowledge of God, and has no separate existence out of God's thought, it is no more God than the blueprint of a house is the architect. Yet, although things can be considered as differentiations in the knowledge of God, this knowledge of God in its essence is considered to be as eternal as God's Being Itself.

Thus, under the influence of Aristotle, Averroes taught that the essences of the corporeal world are eternal and that the modifications of their appearances are subjected to a universal determinism directed by the influence of the heavenly bodies considered as relays of the projecting cognisant will of God as in Astrology. This Aristotelian theory, largely adopted by St. Augustine, has led some Moslem thinkers like Avicenna, to consider all human mental operations as having their origin in a separate activity of God's active principle of knowledge. This was even adopted by some Christian Medieval scholastics who professed what Professor Gilson calls an "Avicennised Augustinianism." Such an idea would of course lead mystics to a practice of meditation so as to become able to perceive the imageless cause active in the production of the illusory pageant of world imagery.

This theory is very near the Hindu idea that the whole

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perceptible universe is but the many coloured cloak of Iswara, which the image-producing, or Maya-producing, power of the Bearer of the Universe wraps around his creative volition to give form to the sensible universe. To the mystic lover of the One, all images, whether perceived by the senses or "imagined" by the mind are snares, distracting the soul from the perception of the Real, the all-underlying unique essence of the Cosmos. "The first step in the path of unity is the oblivion of multiplicity," (Kashfel Mahjub). And this very explicit statement: "Except God who is the real and absolute Existence and Operator, nothing else exists, all other existences, attributes and actions are unreal, thus the reflexion of every existence is from the light of the Absolute Essence." (Awarif al Ma'arif.)

This idea that God being the only reality, the world of objects is void of real existence, being at most a pure idea in God's knowledge, is near the Buddhist Sunyata. Between this and the belief of simple people in the reality of God's creation, a middle term was provided by several great doctors such as Averroes, and El Ghazali the Augustine and Thomas of Islam, respectively, and by Avicenna, whose contribution to the Moslem Sunna was hardly less important. They reproduced the theory of Plotinus that the world proceeds from God through the emanation of intermediary beings. The First Cause being immaterial and pure of any accident or attribute, can produce immediately only one simple being, the first-born of the Lord, approximating the Word or Son of Christian theology. Being relative to the Causeless Cause, it is imperfect, but enjoys the faculty of intelligence. In its turn the divine Emanation engenders a second Intelligence, capable of differentiation, and from whom emanates in successive hypostases the whole universe. Each emanation of the Divine Intelligence produces a heavenly sphere, and terrestrial beings result from the activity of the Intelligence animating their sphere.

Thus, in the complete void of His Essential Uniqueness,

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God was the virtuality of all the attributes which were to give creatures their particular characteristics. This gave rise to a semi-dualistic theory. God's being is absolute and unlimited by any attribute, while the being and essence of objects, Dhat, is limited by attributes and by names, those mirrors of the materially creative and spiritually deadening attributes. The first step in limitation and bondage was achieved by the descent of God into His knowledge of Himself. The world is thus the result of the restriction of the Essential Infinite Reality, El Haq, by Banda, the principle of restrictive and cognitive differentiation, akin to the Tanha of Buddhism. Banda engenders the appearance of all beings and objects. Thus there are two principles of being for the manifested universe: The Divine Essence and Reality, and Banda, the restrictive element, dissociating the infinite unity in manifold separate entities. But as there can be only one essence of reality, Banda is relative and not real. (Haqiqi.)

Since perfection belongs to the essence of being, (Dhat) God being absolute is also absolute perfection, absolute goodness and pure, formless beauty, a Platonic triad. The one reality being that of God, and since perfection is His essence, all imperfect conditions can have no reality and must be illusory. "The judgment that we give when we judge an action to be foolish or wicked, a statement false, a work of art ugly, are all metaphorical. We do not mean to say that there is an actual existence called error, ugliness or foolishness, but that there is a given existence and that another is wanting." (Khadja Khan. Studies in Tasawuf.)

Thus, all particular existence is engendered by a restriction of the Divine, Unique, Perfect Reality, and the way to unity is the restriction of the restriction, hence the name given to the pursuit of the Sufis, Fana, attenuation of the Self.

This enables man to escape the consequences of universal limitation since Fana, Self-attenuation is really the cleansing of the mirror of one's impersonal heart and the unfettering



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from the attachment to material limitations which prevents the soul from apprehending the splendour of the "Real" subjacent to all appearances.

A Persian Sufi wrote: "Know that I have found this universe to be the shrine of Divine mysteries; to created things has God entrusted Himself and within that which exists has He hid Himself. Substances and accidents, elements, bodies, forces and properties are all the veils of those mysteries. In the doctrine of the Unity, the existence of all these would be Polytheism, But God Most High has ordained that this universe by its own being should be veiled from His unity. Therefore the spirits of men are absorbed in their own phenomenal existence so that their minds fail to perceive the Divine mysteries, and their spirits but dimly apprehend the wonderful nearness of God. Man is engrossed with himself and heedless of aught else, and so he fails to recognize the unity behind all things and is blind to the beauty of oneness and will not taste the joy offered to him by the One, and is turned aside by the vanities of this world from the vision of the Truth and allows the animal soul to predominate, though it is the most potent of all the veils between man and God."

Passions are engendered by outer objects perceived as objects of satisfaction for the individual or as menaces to his being or comfort; they nourish and develop the sense of self-consciousness which is the obstacle to the perception of the Divine Presence in the Super-soul. As progress is made along the way of Unity, as the mirror of man's consciousness becomes more and more purified from the defilement of Banda, his vision becomes ever more extensive but includes an ever lesser number of distinct perceptions, until finally he transcends even his own self-perception, thus escaping the last limiting influence of Banda. As Jami puts it:

"Thou art but the Glass,  
And He the face confronting it which casts

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Its image upon the mirror. He alone  
Is manifest, and thou in truth art hid  
Pure love, like beauty coming but from Him,  
Reveals itself in Thee. If steadfastly  
Thou canst regard, Thou wilt at length perceive  
He is the mirror also, He alike  
The treasure and the casket. "I", and "Thou"  
Have no place and are but phantasies  
Vain and unreal."

(Jami. Translation of E. G. Brown)

Yet, if seen from the point of view of the Absolute, the world has no reality, from the standpoint of creatures, it is endowed with enough reality by the presence of the Divine Essence within: the restrictions of Banda, to be accepted with awe and wonderment by man as God's work.

The doctrine of Tawhid, Divine Unity and Unicity, is the corner-stone of the whole of Moslem theology. It was a powerful incentive to the mystical quest as well as to a general other-worldliness, which is one of the chief characteristics of Islam.

Out of it the different Sufi Schools have evolved many more or less different theories of mystical theology. Neglecting the secondary distinctions, we shall try to outline the main lines of what can be considered as the generally accepted doctrines of Sufism. They can be formulated in seven points.

### I. THE DIVINE ESSENCE IS ABSOLUTELY PURE AND VOID OF ATTRIBUTES.

This we have already seen.

### II. GOD, SOLE REALITY "EL HAQ" OF THE UNIVERSE, ABSOLUTE EXISTENCE, AND ESSENCE OF TRUTH, BEAUTY AND LOVE, IS ALL PERVAIDING AND TRANSCENDS TIME AND SPACE.

Thus God escapes even the definitions of negative theology. "Purge yourself from affirmation and negation." (Gulshan I Raz)

"One who is an individual cannot describe the Divine Unity; when he describes unity, he denies it." Yet, the very attempt to define God is a testimony to His existence:

"From truth what does spring forth but truth, O Dear!  
Who else can describe the truth, except the truth, O Dear!  
In these vivid manifestations of the differentiated attributes,  
Who else seeks the Truth, except the Truth, O Dear!"

(Persian Sufi)

### III. THE WHOLE OF DIVERSITY AND MULTIPLICITY IS VOID OF ABSOLUTE REALITY AND VALUE.

This is proclaimed by the famous surat: "We created heaven and earth and all that is in between, they are unreal."

### IV. CREATION HAS A PURPOSE.

This is explicitly proclaimed by the Koran: "We have not created the heaven and the earth and whatever is between them by way of sport."

Undeterred by the implied relativity, and following Plotinus, Sufis hold that creation is the outcome of the nature of God. Since being is the essence of perfection, it is also the essence of Beauty, and absolute Beauty is also the cause of Absolute Love. Perfect beauty and perfect love engendered the universe, since it is the nature of beauty to evoke Love and the nature of love to seek an object. This idea has been beautifully expressed by Jami:

"In solitude where Being singless dwelt,

And the Universe still dormant lay concealed in selfishness

From all duality. Beauty supreme,

Unmanifest except unto itself,

By its own light, yet fraught with power to charm

The souls of all, concealed in the unseen,

An essence pure, unstained by aught of ill,

Wherever beauty dwells, such is its nature and its heritage,



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From everlasting Beauty which emerged  
From realms of purity, to shine upon  
The worlds and all the souls that dwell therein.  
One gleam fell from it upon the Universe,  
And on the Angels, and this simple ray,  
Dazzled the Angels, till their senses whirled,  
Like the revolving sky. In diverse forms  
Each mirror showed it forth and everywhere  
Its praise was chanted in new harmonies  
Each speck of matter did He constitute  
A mirror, causing each to reflect  
The beauty of His visage. From the rose  
Flashed forth His beauty. And the nightingale  
Beholding it, loved madly. From that Light  
The candle drew its lustre which beguiles  
The moth to immolation. On the Sun  
His beauty shone and straightaway from the wave  
The Lotus reared its head.  
Each shining lock of Leila's hair attracted Majnu's  
heart

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Because some ray divine reflected shone  
On her fair face...  
His beauty everywhere doth show itself  
And through the forms of earthly beauty shine  
As through a veil.

Where'er thou seest a veil, beneath that veil He hides  
Whatever heart doth yield to love He charms it. . . ."

In a more metaphysical vein, Rumi wrote another cosmogenetic poem which completes Jami's to give a balanced idea of the Sufi poetical treatment of high religious themes. "From all eternity the Beloved unveiled His beauty in the solitude of the unseen

He held up the mirror to Himself, He displayed His loveliness to Himself.

He was both spectator and spectacle, no eye but His had surveyed the Universe.

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All was one, there was no duality, no pretence of "Mine" or "Thine"

The vast orb of heaven, with its myriads of outgoing and incomings was concealed in a single point.

The creation lay cradled in the sleep of no existence like a child ere it has breathed,

The eyes of the beloved seeing what was not, regarded nonentity as existent.

Although he beheld His qualities and attributes as a perfect whole in His own essence

Yet He desired that they should be displayed to Him in another mirror

And that each one of his Universal attributes should become manifest accordingly in a diverse form

Therefore He created the verdant fields of Time and Space, and the lifegiving garden of the world.

That every branch and leaf and fruit might show forth its various perfections

The cypress gave a hint of his comely stature, the rose gave tidings of its beauteous countenance,

Wherever beauty peeped out, love appeared beside it

Wherever beauty shone on a rosy cheek love lit his torch from that flame.

Wherever beauty dwelt in dark tresses, love came and found a heart entangled in their coils.

Beauty and love are as body and soul, beauty is the mine and love the precious stone.

They have always been together from the very first.

Never have they travelled but in each other's company."

Along the arc of descent of creative involution Sufism describes seven stages, "martaba i Nazul" and seven on the arc of ascent. In the return to God, the "Martaba I Uruj", the soul in the process of self attenuation has to transcend all these stations before reaching God. This theory of progressive deification rests on many Koranic texts: "From God we are, to God we shall return." "You will surely be transformed from state to state."

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Thus man was not simply created to attain salvation, he is to undergo a spiritual evolution creating new values in him. Life upon the earth is merely an occasion to gain experience which will be useful further along the way, in the next world. "This world is one of the stages along the high road of religion. It is the staging station for the pilgrim journeying towards God. It is a brilliant market opened at the beginning of the vast valley to be crossed by pilgrims who have to secure from it provisions for the way.

This world and the next are only two states of human life. That which exists before death and is the nearest to the valley, is called this world. . . . The object for this world . . . is that it should supply provisions for the next." (El Ghazali)

Man is a part of a mighty evolution taking the souls back to the creator after having functioned along the sevenfold realms of Creation. This conviction that the soul animates successively finer organisms helps Sufis to temper their otherworldliness with an optimistic appraisal of this world and its purport.

Rumi has expressed poetically this palingenesis :

"Man first appeared in the class of inorganic things.

Then he rose from it to that of the plants,

Remembering nothing of his inorganic stage so different.  
And when he passed from the vegetable realm to the animal,

He had no memory of his vegetable life,  
Except the yearning which he felt for the world of plants.  
Especially at the season of spring and of fragrant flowers,  
Like unto the yearning of children for their mothers  
Who do not know the cause of their attraction towards  
their breasts,

Again, the great Creator, as you know,  
Elevated man from the animal to the human.  
Thus man passed from one realm of nature to another,



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Until he became wise, knowing and strong as he is now.  
Of his first soul he has kept no memory  
And he shall yet rise above his present soul."

Jami was very conscious of this upward trend in the history of the soul which he thus described :

"Dying from the inorganic, I developed into the stage of vegetation.

Dying from the vegetable I rose to the state of the animal.

Leaving the animal I became man.

Then, why shall I fear that death will diminish me?

The next transition from humanity through death will lead me to the dignity of the angels. Then from the angelic state,

I shall soar higher and become what no man can conceive. Then, I shall merge in the Infinite, in non-existence, as in the beginning." (Mathnavi)

We now come to the fifth article of the Sufi doctrine :

V. GOD'S EFFICIENT ASPECT, THE UNIVERSAL SOUL. "RUH I BASIT" ANIMATES THE WHOLE UNIVERSE, IT IS PRESENT IN EVERY SOUL AND PRINCIPLE OF LIFE WHICH ARE OF GOD AND FROM GOD.

The reality in man is the Divine soul or spirit. Ruh, the ruach of the kabbala. It animates the lower worldly soul, the Nafs, but without being involved in its concrete terrestrial operations. The Nafs is divided in three levels. On the lowest, it presides over the organic life. The intermediary degree corresponds to the animal consciousness, dealing with sensory perceptions and the pleasures resulting from them. The superior aspect of the Nafs is the seat of imagination, deliberate reasoning and volition. Those superior activities are mostly based on the results of earthly perceptions and experience. Yet, in its highest flights, the Nafs may receive intuitive light from the Ruh to which it is appended.

VI. THE REAL IS THE ONLY ESSENCE OF TRUE KNOWLEDGE, BEAUTY AND GOODNESS.

Their contemplation affords ways of access to communion with the divine Reality, but the soul can only behold these pure emanations of God when free from the interest of the Nafs in worldly appearances.

VII. THE HIGH AIM OF HUMAN LIFE IS TO ACHIEVE UNION WITH GOD.

This is the object of Sufism.

Many Sufis would want to add other points to the seven doctrinal articles we have seen, while others would condense them in three :

I—THE ULTIMATE REALITY IS ONE.

II—THE ULTIMATE REALITY IS IMPERSONAL.

III—THE ULTIMATE REALITY CAN BE KNOWN BY REACHING SUPERSENSORY, IMPERSONAL KNOWLEDGE.

The Sufi who enters the Path "Tariqat" becomes a Salik, wayfarer. Through the attainment of Gnosis or Ma'rifat, the Tariqat, takes him successively on the six planes of the world of manifestation, until he reaches the exalted region of Divine Proximity and Union in the seventh. This tradition of a sevenfold constitution of the universe corresponds to that of the Sapta loka of the Hindu Shastras, although it is probably derived directly from Plotinus, unless it was received from the same view entertained by many Christian theologians and which envisions seven planes of activity to which correspond the seven mansions of the soul of Santa Teresa.

In Sufi terminology, these seven cosmic planes are, beginning with the lower ones :

I. ALAM I SUGRAH. The world of composite human experience, in which man can function successively on all the planes of the Cosmos, because of his nature making of him a microcosm, with replicas of all planes.

II. ALAM I NASUT. The material world of forms and bodies.

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III. ALAM I MITHAL. The world of astral counterparts and patterns.

IV. ALAM I MALAKUT. The beautiful world of soul series, corresponding to the Angelic stages reached when the soul, while still functioning through the Nafs, submitted to the limitations of Banda, has already established contact with the spiritual Ruh. Corresponds to Plato's ideas, considered in their intelligible superior aspect.

V. ALAM I JABRUT. The Teja Loka of Yoga, radiant plane of divine splendour, reached when consciousness is completely transferred from the Nafs to the Ruh. Some of Mohammed's Hadith refer to it in the vein of the Delphian oracle: "Know thyself and thou shalt know the Lord." "Whosoever realizes himself, realizes his God."

VI. ALAM I LAHUT. The exalted divine plane of the first emanation, the Brahma loka of Yoga, the world of Saguna Brahman, God endowed with the attributes of creative deity. On this plane all sentiment of individuality is lost in the consciousness of Unity. It is the plane of the divine essences and attributes of the first emanation, and while transcending human understanding it preserves a faint measure of consciousness and intelligibility.

VII. ALAM I HAHUT. Plane of absolute inactual being, the Satya Loka of Yoga, corresponding to the reality of Buddhist Sunyata, and called by almost the same name, "Absolute void", "Gharb i Mutlaq."

These seven planes are not to be considered as localities in space but as grades of the manifestations of the attributes, in the manner of Plotinian hypostasis. "Nearness of God does not consist in rising up higher . . . nearness to the real is in the release from the prison of self." Rumi.

Sufis attain the heights of communion through the attenuation, Fana, of the personality-asserting faculties of the soul. This requires a threefold set of factors. First, the indispensable grace of God, second the help of a Spiritual



director, (the Sheikh, Guru of the Hindus ), and thirdly the intense fervour of the aspirant.

The cathartic practice of the Saliks is threefold, including the control and purification of bodily, emotional and mental vehicles. Man ascends along the sevenfold arch of return through the successive acquisition of seven main virtues, each progress in moral purification bringing about a psychological readjustment to a purer and higher plane. Whenever he conquers a set of binding passions, the Salik reaches a higher degree of interior freedom and he achieves also a new capacity of vision.

These seven stages of purification and corresponding enlightenment are :

- 1) REPENTANCE, in three degrees : from sin, from the neglect of God and from all that was not God. It brings "Nearness to God", the sense of His presence in the world of objects.
- 2) PATIENCE, the Vairagya of India, the Apatheia of Greece and Christian Fathers. It procures "Love", integrating man in the universe.
- 3) SHUKR, the active form of Patience in which is seen the giver and not the gift. It brings "Fear of sin" as a deterrent of Nearness.
- 4) RENUNCIATION. A real appraisal of the value of sensory gratifications brings their relinquishment. This brings "Confident yearning for God," the soul feeling assured that she has made the right choice.
- 5) POVERTY. Weaned from all illusory images and their solicitations the soul recovers pristine purity and singleness of purpose. This liberating poverty is that of the Beatitude "Happy are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven shall belong to them." It produces a "Tranquil intimacy" similar to that of Acquired orison of the Christian.
- 6) TRUST IN GOD. Detachment from objects brings about the disappearance of self-concern and a secure sense of the immediacy of the Lord. Psychologically, it results in full formless contemplation.

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7) SATISFACTION. (Baqa) The complete attenuation of self brings the soul to the end of the Tariqat. It results in the stage of "Certainty" in which, after the spiritual wedding, faith is replaced by knowledge and back-sliding is precluded.

It is interesting to note that while the Nafs, the earthly personality is threefold, the Ruh is also treble as in the Hindu conception of the relation of Atma with the soul. Sufis distinguish, first the Sirr, or conscience, a pure possibility of consciousness, void of contents; the spirit proper, Ruh, active efficient agent of the Divine creative impulse, and thirdly, the heart, or Qalb, which is close to the Nafs to the extent of becoming entangled in worldly passions, as the Jivatma was subject to the limitation of Karma. The Qalb is the meeting point of God and of the Earth in man. As Rumi puts it "Here a world, and there a world . . . I am seated on the threshold."

Hence the particular importance attached to the heart. Turning to the world it is the mirror of creation, turning inward it is the mirror of God.

A Hadit says : "The heavens and the earth of mine cannot contain me, but the heart of my faithful servant can contain me." Hence a Persian mystic exclaimed : "Win a human heart, for that is the greater pilgrimage. One human heart is superior to thousands of Kaaba. The heart is the footpath of the All-Mighty, the All-Magnificent, while the Kaaba is only a building raised by Abraham, the son of Terab." And emulating Paul and Augustine, Hafiz added : "Hurt no heart and do whatever thou pleaseth, for there is no other sin in our religious canon."

Four degrees of attenuation are described; the Fana fi sheikh, the disciple subduing completely his personality in obedience to his superior. The Fana fir Rasul, attenuation in the gratitude for the prophet, the vehicle of God's grace. The Fana Fillah, attenuation in God, and the Fana al fana

attenuation of the attenuation, the Buddhist stage beyond consciousness and unconsciousness.

Besides meditation and self mastery, prayer is the great instrument of attainment. Sufis make particular use of prolonged repetition of God's names, the Dikr, akin to Christian Litanies, in which they seek to shut out all forms of consciousness other than their striving for Union with Him. The Dikr must come from the bottom of the heart.

Like other mystics, Sufis have denounced the limitation of reason in the quest of the Absolute. They refer to the authority of Aristotle who said in his *Theology*: "One becomes capable of conceiving the intelligible world through spiritual contemplation, not through logic and syllogism." Hence Bayasid al Bistami told the Ulemas, the learned doctors; "You receive a dead science from dead people. We receive our science from the Living One, who does not die." Saadi said also "The path of reason is but a crooked labyrinth, maze within maze. With the adepts, there is none in existence save God. This can be said only to those who know reality, but the people of reason will find fault with it."

As to the lovers of God, al Hujwiri tells us that their existence seems unreal to them, "whether in his satisfaction or in his wrath, since their heart dwells ever in His presence...their hearts are detached from the creatures and the fetters of the stations and states, and their souls have escaped from all existences and have attached themselves to God."

This denunciation of intellectual constructions extends even to religious forms and Sufis have displayed an extraordinary freedom in regard to them. Ibn el Arabi said: "Those who adore God in the Sun, behold the Sun, and those who adore Him in living things see a living thing, and those who adore Him in lifeless things see a lifeless thing, and those who adore Him as a being unparalleled and unique see that which has no like. Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively ... otherwise ... you will



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fail to recognize the whole truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent is not limited by any one Creed for He says (Koran 2-109) "Wheresoever ye turn there is the face of Allah." Every one praises what he believes; his God in his own creature and in praising it he praises himself. Consequently he blames the beliefs of others, which he would not do if he were just, but his dislike is based on ignorance. If he knew Junayd's saying "the water takes its colour from the vessel containing it," he would not interfere with other men's beliefs but would perceive God in every form of belief. "

And Arabi summed up his position in a poem :

"My heart has become capable of every form,

It is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,

And a temple for idols, and the pilgrim's Ka'ba

And the tables of the Thora and the book of the Koran.

I follow the religion of Love whichever way its camels take.

My religion and my faith is the true religion."

A Sufi poem expresses their effort to escape the sepulchre of formalism;

The true mosque in a pure and holy heart

Is built, there let all men worship God,

For there he dwells, not in a Mosque of stone."

And the last word in spiritual freedom was uttered by the wandering dervish, Abu el Khayr :

"Not until every mosque beneath the sun lies ruined will our holy work be done ;

And never will true Musulman appear

Till faith and infidelity are one. "

This true catholicity, or rather, this supreme independence from the worship of any form is the outcome of Union. Many Sufis have left accounts of their experiences. Al-Bis-tami describes thus his spiritual career: "For twelve years I was a smith of my soul. I put it in the furnace of austerities and burned it with the fire of combat and laid it on the

anvil of reproach and smote upon it with the hammer of blame until I made of my soul a mirror. Five years I was the mirror of myself, polishing that mirror with diverse forms of worship and piety. Then for a year I gazed in contemplation. On my waist I saw a girdle ( Zoroastrian symbol of dualism ) of pride, of vanity and of self-deceit, and reliance on devotion and approbation of my works. I laboured for five more years until the girdle became cut and I professed Islam anew. I looked and saw that all created things were dead. I pronounced four prayers over them and returned from the funeral of them all, and without intrusion of creature, through God's help alone, I attained unto God."

If love has been the origin and cause of creation, of the enfoldment of Spirit in matter, it is also the agent of the spiritual progress and of return to unity. In reality it is naught but the echo of the presence of God in the heart, and the very messenger of Grace, without which there would be no seeking of union. "In the beginning I was mistaken in four respects. I concerned myself to remember God, to know Him, to love Him and to seek Him, and when I had come to the end I saw that He had remembered me before I had remembered Him, that His knowledge of me preceded my knowledge of Him, His love toward me had existed before my love for Him, and He sought me before I sought Him" ( Al Bistami. ) The Sufi doctrine on this all-important point, which illustrates the process of Grace, is resumed in a verse: *Ishk Allah, Mahbub allah*. "The lover of God is the beloved of God". Love is grace reaching full consciousness in its reflection in the purified heart, in which according to a Sufi poet: "The beloved, the mirror and the image are one."

Like the Hindu and Buddhist mystical theologies Sufi doctors reject figured visions and formal experiences bordering on the psychic. Said Shabistani "Cast away vain tales and mystic states, dreams of light and marvels of miracles. Your

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miracles are comprised in the worship of Truth. All besides it is pride, vainglory and illusion of existence."

They particularly warn against the tendency of beginners to be carried away by the first flashes of transcendent vision. "Some devotees on discerning the manifestation of the soul by flashes of intuition in deep meditation, its relations with the world of phenomena, its mysteries and incomprehensible nature and its vastness pervading the world of things and mind, take the soul as being the Protector of the Universe and worship him as the Supreme." ( Abu Sayd ) Al Bistami tells us that after diligent practice he had access to a world of radiant light which he mistook for God and worshipped for twelve years. Then he received a greater measure of grace, discovered that he had been worshipping the light of his soul and he turned to the Real.

Yet if visions are not really spiritual they are often met on the way to higher contemplation and Sufis describe the characteristics of these intermediary perceptions. Thus el sheikh el Senussi described seven colourings of successive ecstasies : "Some feeble lights illumine the ecstasies of devout humanity. The passionate ecstasy is light blue, the ecstasy of the heart is flaming red, the ecstasy of the immaterial soul is yellow, the mysterious ecstasy is white, the colour of the ecstasy of obsession is that of limpid mirrors. The seventh or complete and beatific ecstasy is green and white, then changes to that of fleeting scintillation of jewels. "

Al Bistami tells us how he passed through the seven heavens with their radiant arrays of angels and colourful visions but finally arrived at the foot of the throne of glory of the Lord. Then he reached supreme contemplation. "He gave me to drink from the fountain of grace in the cup of fellowship and transformed me in a state beyond description, and brought me near unto Him, and so near did He bring me to Him that I became nearer to Him than the spirit is to the body, and I continued until I became even as the souls of men had been in that state before existence was, and God abode in solitude."



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This is the crowning experience and attainment of Sufism, this precious mystical jewel of Islam. Like the other schools of mystical quest it has brought men to soar, with the help of Grace, from the world of division, the world of the Fall to the bosom of the Father whose kingdom is above the heavens but whose countenance the Sufi beholds everywhere.

This call to the perception of Unity, of the Tawhid, the keynote of Islam is magnificently expressed in a poem of Kuhi of Shiraz which is a fitting conclusion of this too short survey of Moslem Mysticism.

"In the market, in the cloister . . . Only God I saw  
In the valley and on the mountain — Only God I saw  
Him I have seen beside me oft in tribulation,  
In favour or in fortune — only God I saw  
In prayer and fasting, in praise and in contemplation,  
In the religion of the prophet — only God I saw.  
Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance.  
Qualities nor causes. Only God I saw.  
I opened my eyes, and by the light of His face around me,  
In all the eye discovered, — only God I saw.  
Like a candle, I was melting in this fire;  
Amidst the flames outflashing, — only God I saw.  
Myself, with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,  
But when I looked with God's eyes, — only God I saw.  
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished.  
And Lo! I was the All-Living, — Only God I saw."

## LECTURE VIII.

### *Conclusion : The Message of Mysticism*

WE COME to the end of our journey through the spiritual treasures of the great religions. The greatest saints of the East and the West have revealed to us the multi-coloured aspects of the divine quest in a mighty concert in which all these great souls played their part, with the efficient aspect of the Creator as the conductor, while the harmonies of the spheres provided the foundation from which the celestial melodies of soul-attunement, unfoldment and merging in the Divine, took their flight to splendours beyond the highest heavens.

We have been through so many halls of magnificence and seen so many vistas of radiant glory, we sensed so repeatedly the tremendous, august and awe-inspiring Divine Reality beneath the very thin veil of religious transport, that we would be tempted to preserve that deep silence which is the only fitting commentary on the Divine Presence.

Yet as we are still in the stage where mental constructions and images exercise more influence on our life than the pure but too ethereal intuitions of spiritual realization, it is fitting that we should try to draw the conclusion of our journey through the mystic naves of religion.

Before undertaking the inventory of our findings, we must first take a quick glance at the claims of mystical experiences to validity. Some scholars have held that far from being of a transcendent nature, they were the sorry products of mental diseases. During the heyday of materialism, in the seventies and eighties of the last century, many psychiatrists and psychologists held the various aspects of ecstasy

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to be but symptoms of hysteria or catalepsy. They classified all saintly mystics with the variegated maniacs thronging the asylums. Even to this day, materialists are trying to describe ecstasies as due to pathological perturbations of normal mental processes. They insist in making no distinction between religious experience and all forms of hallucination. "We would assert that there can be no essential difference between ecstasies whether produced by narcotics, or by hypnotic suggestion or again by what is known as religious ideas. Otherwise it would be necessary that human nature should vary in its very core." (De Montmorand. *Rev. Philo.* 1905)

The monolithic view of human nature has been discarded not only by religious authors but also by academical psychologists. They differentiate between the haphazard ecstasies of diseased brains, and those of normally sound brains. These include not only the experiences of saints, but also those of the philosophers, wrapt up in their intense concentration and estranged from the outside world, like Archimedes at the siege of Syracuse, and later Newton, Pascal, W. Scott, Gauss, etc.

After the works of Myers on the subliminal consciousness, after the study of the different levels of consciousness, after the psycho-analytic and more recent modern schools, it is no longer necessary to plead for a more comprehensive view of human nature. This became already clear nearly half a century ago to a master like Binet who said : "There would be some naivety in holding that this consciousness which is personal to us and in which we usually remain is the only one existing in us." (*Les altérations de la personnalité.*)

And Magnan, one of the master psychiatrists of officially skeptical France, declared, after lengthy clinical researches : "One has neither the right to mistake mystical ecstasies for other states receiving the same name, nor to classify mystics with the mystical degenerates whose insanity occasionally assumes a religious form."



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There is a fundamental difference between religious ecstasies and those of hysteria and catalepsy. While pathological delirium and trance produce an intense mental and physical fatigue and leave a disconnected mental condition, religious ecstasy is usually highly beneficent, leaving the body quiet and rested and the mind enjoying a peaceful serenity. This disposes effectively of the view which would consider ecstasy as resulting from a temporary disintegration of consciousness, in a return to the vague conscious states of prenatal intra-uterine life. According to this conception the successive steps of the *Via Mystica* would be carrying man backwards along the scale of the progresses which took him from sub-conscious experience to full individualised perceptions. Thus mysticism would be a temporary anticipation of senile infantility.

This view is disproved by the facts that mystical ecstasies usually result in an increase of the wisdom of the subject and often of his executive ability as is proven by the many mystics who founded religious orders or by the great mystical poets.

We may also reject the somewhat Freudian attempts at representing ecstasies as erotomaniac substitutes for repressed sexual urges. The purely allegorical character of erotic mystical literature is too well known to need any additional commentary.

Thus the opinion of religious writers are bolstered by the findings of unbiased academic authorities, and we feel justified in attempting to draw the lessons of mystical experience. In our introduction we saw William James claimed that in the light of religious experience, we were led to take into account the existence of new regions of the universe, although religious intuitions yet failed to provide a map of the *terra incognita*.

Before attempting to define the outstanding messages brought by the mystics from their forays beyond the great divide separating the sector of creation which is known

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to us from the mysterious unknown we have to begin with a word of caution which shall be the first gift from "the people of the hidden" to give them their Sufi name. It is that there is no usable common measure between the things of our earth and the factors of the spiritual realm.

Most of the growing literature dedicated to mysticism illustrates the wisdom of Buddha when he forbade his disciples to indulge in discourses on metaphysical objects. Our mental processes are fashioned by our sensory experiences, and the language which we use to exchange our judgments of values with other men has been aptly called crystallized psychology. It is the end product of our dealings with sensory data. Therefore, if mystical perceptions are at all capable of enlarging human experience and enriching our knowledge of the full universe in introducing man to another realm of being, language is by definition precluded from the possibility of giving anything like an adequate formulation of the data of the subtle spheres of the universe. Consequently all the descriptions of the mystics are to be taken as mere symbols aiming more at suggesting than describing. And, they can only suggest anything of value if the reader has already some experience pertaining to the subject. Thus a vicious circle. At best, they are a challenge and an incentive to the mindbound, to launch on an effort to transcend the present limitations of experience.

Yet there are some general features of the reports of mystical experience which have achieved a sort of definable clarity because of the many similar and cumulative evidences given by almost countless mystics from all times, belonging to all races, and most of whom knew nothing of the faiths of mystic schools other than their own. That they should have arrived at something like a consensus of interpretation of their experiences without premeditated accord is a strong assumption that they had access to the same reality as a starting point of their interpretations. In fact it seems that as a provisional working hypothesis we are justified in try-

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ing to sort out all the concordances and compatible points of their accounts in order to make a composite picture which can provide a faint image of the map of the ethereal regions sensed by William James.

The first great fact acknowledged is that there are two species of mystical experience, those dealing with objective perceptions and those of a purely subjective nature. The first are constituted by the perceptions of metaphysical objects, angels, lights, Divine persons, effulgent and radiant glories and other undescribable entities. In their higher forms they lead to active contemplation. The others consist of the consciousness of the progressive attenuation of the limits and characterising attributes of the soul until it finally empties itself as it were in the Infinite, in self-obliterating passive ecstasy.

The highest flights of mystical experience prove clearly that these two processes are not exclusive but complementary. Even the most enthusiastic describers of the glories surrounding the celestial legions as they hover around the throne of the All-mighty, reach a point when they emerge in the silent night of the Spirit, that is, if they are ready for the final journey.

It also seems that an imposing consensus is arrived at by a vast array of Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Moslem witnesses to the effect that the contemplation of transcendent objective entities, while it may be a stepping-stone towards higher realms when considered from the earthy standpoint, is really a stumbling block from the standpoint of spiritual reality. If it helps to detach the soul from earthy lures, it may ensnare it into the relishing of experiences which although caused by objects belonging to an emanation nearer the Divine Source than those we are usually dealing with, are none the less part of the world of division and differentiation, the world against which Christ warned us when He said "My kingdom is not of this world."

Our newly acquired understanding of the mechanism



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of our perception of the world of our daily experiences has brought us to a realization of the fact that there is no relationship between the objects by which we are surrounded on the physical plane and the stories told to us on their account by our senses. We have absolutely no guarantee that on all the different levels of the properly spiritual world, the perceptive faculties of the soul are endowed with a more faithful perception than the material senses in their own field. Yet, on the other hand our scientific thinkers are bent upon accepting a realistic view of the cosmic process, and upon assuming that if our sensory perceptions are arbitrary and inadequate, they are caused by emergent epochal occasions endowed with specific reality. In the same strain, may we not assume that the many similar perceptions reported by innumerable mystics, if perhaps also created by their imaginative faculties, are referring to specific objects and realms of emergent processes, on higher planes and of a less concrete and definite nature than the objects with which our material senses are dealing?

If this view is justified, the attempt to organize the description of the transcendent world of mystical experience into a representation, in some measure continuous with our physical notions, is extremely hazardous. It amounts to trying to translate into our vocabulary engendered by matter, what is already a translation of the immediate experience of the actual realities of the cosmic process by the apprehending conditioning of the responsive faculties of mystical awareness. Thus a second degree of remoteness from our object. Yet, since the new physics postulate the metaphysical inclusion of the cosmic whole in each of the emerging processes of reality, and since we cannot merely discard specific differentiations of manifesting objects, we are driven to contemplate the existence of a realm of factors producing these differentiating characteristics out of the Cosmic Unity.

Such a world of complex intermediary factors between

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undifferentiated life force and differentiated individuals, is precisely that which is reported by the mystics. Greeks, Hebrews and Christians describe seven stories of successively denser and more concrete realms from the Divine Unity to our earthy world.

The fact that Hinduism also has its *Sapta Loka*, indicates that if this representation is a purely arbitrary mental creation, it must be of a very ancient origin, probably anterior to the division of the wandering Aryan tribes prior to the invasions of India and Persia.

In the present stage of our knowledge it would be pure fancy to attempt to organize our picture of the whole Cosmic Reality in accordance with that septennary scale. It would be all the more hazardous that there is no unanimity on that point. Some schools of mystics have compressed these seven realms into five, and even three generic cosmic planes. In our day, we see Whitehead taking into account three transcendent active realities: God, the Process and the eternal forms of possibilities of existence. If we try to interpret the experiences of seers in terms of our present understanding we conceive the possibility of three intermediary realms between the literally incomprehensible Absolute and our practical world. Both of these last can be discarded, the former as being inactual; the world, because we now understand that as we know it, it is purely a creation of our perceptory apparatus, a sort of psychological by-product of the cosmic process. An Indian tradition endorses that concept, and describes the physical world as a world of shadows projected from the world of emerging occasions. This one would correspond to the inferior world of mystical experience on which seers have visions of specific and active objects and beings. It would be the plane upon which creative agencies reach a full conformation to the patterns of the eternal forms of possibilities of Whitehead, in which we all recognize Plato's world of ideas. It is really the world of actual emergence of the products of the

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Cosmic process, since it is the one upon which precise individual appearance is actually reached. One might think of their relation to the physical objects we perceive as a result of the play of our senses on their actuality, as somewhat similar to that existing between the unseen lines of force of a magnetic field and the perceptible constructions of particles of matter organized along them, both being of a purely dynamic nature, but conformed to a pattern.

Above the world of differentiated and organized metaphysical beings, which is the main sphere of the activities of Angelic legions, mystics describe another world of brilliancy and glory. But instead of being the theatre of the activities of individual entities, it is a realm of vast forces, usually depicted as seas of differently coloured glories, or streams of splendour or winds of divine magnificence, or of rains of blessings. In terms of Cosmo-Physics, we might think of that world as being that of the Process of Whitehead, upon which the Bergsonian "Élan vital" assumes the first active differentiations precipitating its creative possibilities towards definite, and ipso facto limited, ends. It would be the world of the first activity of the Demiurge of the ancients. Perhaps, it would correspond to the mysterious realm of the seven spirits before the throne of God, of Christian theology, and which is, perhaps the seat of the plurality of mansions in the Father's house. While its aspects do not reach organic differentiation in their being, they seem to be different among themselves and with a stretch of imagination, one could be tempted to consider them as the differentiated organs of a personified macrocosm, or as the diversification of the operations of the Holy Ghost. But of course we owe it to the warning of our great mystics against the wild and deceptive flights of imagination, to resist the temptation of imposing formal sarcophagi upon living formless realities, which are the very essence of Life as manifesting in the world.

Above these exalted aspects of perceptible appearances,



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comes the supreme realm of the live, unique Reality, infinite, invisible, but felt to be the accomplished essence of life and reality. Whether or not there can be such a thing as complete union with God without final absorption accompanied by the Nirvanic disappearance of the attributes of personality, is something to be decided by more audacious thinkers. Sufficient for our purpose is to take stock of the experience many Mystics have had of reaching a plane completely transcending any objective appearance or form or attribute, in such an absolute purity of being that it is bereft even of light or content, the classical obscure void of the Spirit.

Thus remaining as near empiricism as is compatible with our subject we receive the message of the existence of three superior worlds upon which man can become conscious and enjoy perceptive awareness. They range from the immediate causes of our world of experience to the cosmic substance which Prof. Einstein confesses he is led to accept as being the pantheistic Principle of the Universe.

We now come to a study of the finding of mysticism in the realm of the nature of God. The literature on this subject is so extensive that we would be tempted to feel that in coming to this, we leave the field of speculative phantasy for solid ground, on which we experience the safety of being in the comforting company of a legion of authoritative thinkers. In reality, the fact that many more men have written about the nature of God than upon the structure of the metaphysical universe, in no way renders the nature of the Transcendent Cause of All any more comprehensible for our finite minds. Hence instead of attempting the impossible in undertaking to describe That which transcends all forms, even the most abstract intelligibles, we shall modestly try to see how the findings of mysticism can be related to some of the ideas now currently entertained regarding the nature of God, and the cognate problem of the nature of the soul and its relation to the Lord.

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Here, mystical tradition is greatly at variance with generally accepted ideas, among modern religious thinkers. While these insist on the personal nature of God and of the fundamental and lasting personality of the soul, mystics readily incline to consider any divine person as inferior and relative to the Supreme ineffable Godhead, and also they hold that the sentiment of the personal selfhood of the soul is the main obstacle to its ready access to the Unity of final salvation. Precisely because it is at variance with accepted views, mystical theology is in a position to bring new light on vexed problems.

One can observe nowadays what I would call a preposterous tendency to a Baconian approach to the problem of God. Efforts are made to resort to induction, that is, reasoning from objects of our common experience in order to pass from the known to the unknown in our endeavour to discover the transcendent reality. One might as well try to study psychology on the dissecting table of an anatomical clinic. This tendency is quite respectable since it is an attempt to bolster faith by an appeal to the methods of the new Goddess of mankind, physical science, but, resting on a confusion of genders, it is doomed to failure. In fact, when coupled with a belief in the absolute reality of the world of human experience it leads to astounding results. For instance Professor E. S. Brightman, because of his eagerness to preserve the value of ethical striving against evil is driven to acknowledge the reality of this world and the evil agencies it contains. Thus he considers evil as a real entity and consequently God as being finite. In a truly Zoroastrian vein, the All-Mighty is described as composed of two natures, the Holy will and a "Given", mysterious pole of resistance to the higher divine nature. . . . This is evidently the ransom of radical realism and personalism.

In Professor Wright's system, we see also a Divine Cosmic mind postulated as necessary to a world of ends and aesthetic and moral values. Even an exponent of mysticism



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like Rufus Jones, while holding that "the testimony of the soul is at least as reliable a guide to the eternal nature of things as is the witness which mathematics bears" goes so far as to say: "Reason, mind, thought as it appears in our consciousness is the only clue there is to that deeper fundamental Reason that holds as from one Centre all the threads of reality and purpose in the mighty frame and congeries of things." (How shall we think of God?) I do not need to insist on the wide variance between these views and those expressed by all the great mystics and even by the Father of Metaphysics, Aristotle.

The position of modern mystics would be expressed in a nutshell in saying that if religion is not dealing with a transcendent reality it has not much to offer beyond the Religion of Humanity of Auguste Comte, and if it rests on a transcendent reality capable of offering to men promises of values greater than all those which fail us on this world, then it is irrelevant to try to reason of its nature in terms of the mind and experiences of this world to which it is transcendent. Otherwise we would be going against Aristotle's immortal definition of Justice: To treat equally things that are equal and unequally things that are unequal."

Even as great a thinker as Royce provides us with an example of the danger of close logical reasoning on transcendent realities. In his excellent book: "The World and the Individual," he begins by paying mystics the pragmatic compliment of declaring that "They are the only thorough-going empiricists in the history of philosophy." He adds: "Mysticism has been the ferment of the faith, the forerunner of spiritual liberty, the inaccessible refuge of the noble heretics, the inspirer through poetry of countless youths who know no metaphysics . . . the comforter of those who are weary of finitude. It has determined more than half the technical theology of the church." (85) Yet, like most intellectuals studying mysticism objectively, he resents its otherworldliness and he is determined to corner mystical



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theology in a position where it will have to give up its denunciation of the world.

The gist of his argument is as follows. He begins by defining the goal of the mystic as "the Reality, the Soul, the Self," and he asks: "What is this absolute goal, just insofar as it is real at all? Is it a live being or is it not rather identical with mere non-being, with dreamless sleep?" (p. 188)

To begin with, we trust that by now our hearers will have no difficulty in perceiving that in naming Reality, the Soul and the Self, one is naming three very different entities none of which quite coincides with the Absolute Godhead. While Reality applies excellently to the manifesting aspect of God, the soul is a very loose term which might as well mean the Psyche of St. Paul, the Anima Mundi of Plato or the Atma of India. In this last case we are really dealing with the essence of the Divine Entity, but the notion of the individual, personal soul is foreign to the concept of Atma, "the One without a second." As to the self it can be predicated of the creatively active Deus but not of the Supreme Deitas. At any rate it certainly is not the Absolute. Then Royce calls the Absolute the Goal of the mystic. This is true only in a figurative sense, and as a foundation for future reasoning it is very lax. The pursuit of a goal implies a motion whereby the subject progresses toward an object. The mystic does not aim at reaching God either by increasing his knowledge or the stature of his faculties, but by discarding the limitations of selfhood.

Prof. Royce further stated: "The mystic asserts that the real cannot be wholly independent from knowledge." (P. 189) and later, "that since in us mortals consciousness means ignorance, and since the less we observe our ignorance, the nearer we are to unconsciousness, therefore to be possessed of absolute knowledge is to be unconscious."

To begin with, most mystics would refuse to identify God with the reality which "cannot be wholly independent of

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knowledge." While it is obvious that men can only speak and think of objects imagined and defined by their own limited mental equipment, mystics hold that knowledge is based on differences in the object of knowledge, and between it and its circumscribing opposites, and that therefore, there is no possibility of knowledge in unity. They do not try to expand the limits of their ignorance, but to escape the limitations of their bondage to space, time and causality.

They do not seek unconsciousness, but spiritual union, and this eventually brings about another form of consciousness in which perception is replaced by a pure awareness, independent of objective duality.

Further the Professor points to the fact that the mystic can only define his God in terms of the *Theologia negativa*, and that, "His Absolute is defined by nothing but the absence of finitude, and so is apparently equivalent to nothing at all." Here we should make a very important remark. The object of the *Theologia negativa* is not at all to give a definition of God. The mystic having perceived the impossibility of defining God through any artifice of human language, resorts to *Theologia negativa*, not to achieve the impossible, but to preserve man from worshipping false attributes which cannot be ascribed to the lord. That the mystics do not reduce God to a mere nothing is well known to philosophers. "It would be far from truth to say that the mystic's One, because ineffable, is therefore characterless and neutral." (W. E. Hocking, *Types of Philosophy* 455) One could argue in favour of *Theologia negativa* that since it denies the limitation of attributes in the Infinitude, the negation of a negation assumes a positive value as in Algebra, but this would be a low verbal argument, unworthy of the exalted transcendence under discussion.

Later, Royce trying to argue man's absolute existence from that of the Absolute says: "Just as the zero of mathematics receives its importance from its contrast with other

numbers, if the Absolute is not only a zero, but also real, also the goal, also the valuable, it is so by contrast with the finite search for that goal. Being must be attributed to the principal members of the relation of contrast, both to the seeking and to the attainment . . . the finite then also is, even if imperfect. It is real in its own way if the Absolute is real, and unless the imperfect has reality, then the Absolute has none." ( P. 188 et sq. )

All this very logical argument rests on the hollow premise that the Absolute is the opposite of the relative. This is a capital metaphysical error. It is true that in the realm of manifestation, in the world of the pairs of opposites of the Hindus, any being, object or quality is posited by its corresponding opposite. But this positing dualism which engenders the specific modalities of being takes place on a given plane on which the two terms of the contrast have their being. Heat is the opposite of cold, and they derive from one another their characteristic identity in the realm of thermometry. Obscurity is the opposite of light in the realm of visibility. Impavidity is the opposite of fear in the realm of the sentimental relations with the outside world, and so on. But in no way can the Absolute be considered as member of a duality in which it would derive its being from its opposition to the relative. The Absolute is not the contrary of the relative. It is of another nature. It is not the contrary of the limited circumscribed being of creatures, it is transcendent altogether. In the same way that metaphysical eternity is not the aggregate of an endless succession of instants, but is a constant eternal simultaneity of a transcendent character, the Absolute is not the aggregate of an infinite number of relative objects or values. As Jaures said : "God is not a total but an active infinite, beyond the scope of mathematics."

To make the Absolute dependent on its being the goal of the mystical quest is not only a *Contradictio in terminis*, it is a reduction of the highest aspect of the Transcendent to



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the status of a Demiurge, at best to that aspect of God which projects itself in its creation of a cosmos. The most that one can say of this view is that it is thoroughly pantheistic. It certainly bears no relation to the general view of the mystics regarding God, the soul and the world.

First of all, most mystics feel God to be absolutely transcendent to the Universe of sensory experience. The Pantheistic expressions of mystic poets are not to be interpreted to mean that God, in His supreme reality is in all beings, but that the apparent characteristics of Creation do not limit anywhere nor in any way the full reality of the One. One of the essential states of mystical experience is the sentiment of the undisturbed, illuminated transcendent Reality pervading the whole Cosmos with its infinitude, underlying all chronic and spatial modification with its absolute stability, translated into the human sensation of a supreme and exalted peace which is not made of the reconciliation of opposites, but is beyond the possibility of any ruffling, secure in its absolute unity. Perhaps Aristotle had the experience of that peace which is above the august "Tremendous", when he defined God as the "Immobile motor of the Universe." The saying of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita: "Having created the Universe with a part of myself, I remain," seems to have been inspired in the old Aryan writer by the sense of repose in permanency of the august regions of Divine Proximity.

For most mystics, the Absolute is perfectly independent of the Universe. Whereas the Holy Trinity, in its differentiated characteristics may be considered as coincident with the sum total of the achievements of chronic duration, the Absolute was not before the Alpha, nor will be after the Omega of Cosmic Being, but transcends being and non-being. To most mystics, trying to construct, or vindicate the Absolute with verbal equations is little better than rank logomachy. Perhaps the greatest bone of contention between mystics and those theologians who would reason of

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divine things in the light of their earthly experience, is provided by the notion of personality both human and Divine. It seems as if, not being quite sure of the existence of spiritual realities, many men of good will are loath to sacrifice worldly values for what they fear might be a shadow and cling grimly to their familiar earthly known and treasured experiences. Thus Rufus Jones after having quoted Eckart's "Enter God, exit creatures" comments "I am not ready for this alternative. It writes "Mene" on the whole visible frame of things. It makes incarnation an unreality. It nullifies the significance of the moral struggle. It turns evolution and historical progress into an empty dream. It lands us in a chaos of Maya and illusion. There is nothing stable for our feet to stand upon. The Holy Grail itself becomes dust and ashes. . . . We change our rich colourful world for a pure abstraction. Our human vocabulary loses all its meanings." (Exponents of mysticism, pp. 106 sq.)

The distinguished Professor is absolutely right. Mystical experience exposes the illusory character of the world we are familiar with and which is organized around the sensory data. But modern psychology and physics join mysticism in denying any veracity to our perceptions. We know today that we live in a man-made mirage and that, although custom has rendered many of our representations almost dearer to us than our very life, we must discard them in a supreme effort towards veracity if we want to be true to our highest calling. This is the high ransom of unreserved religious earnestness. Indeed this shedding of the "Old Man", that is, of all that we know and treasure, is a terrible ordeal but have we not been told that man must die ere he can be born to the Spirit?

Fortunately, the All Merciful Providence seems to have placed the remedy near the trial. Generally the first experiences of mystics do not take them immediately to the stunning void of the august Infinity of Unity. They usually bear upon the world of the intermediaries, and this is perceived

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as a brilliant and colourful reality, if anything much more brilliant and real than the world of matter.

Far from feeling plunged into nothingness, they usually interpret their new experiences in terms of their most cherished religious representations and experience a marvellous sense of exaltation and Divine propinquity. For many, the Paradise of their childhood becomes an actuality. They accede to the tremendous experience of the factual vacuity of the Supreme, only after they have been weaned from attachment to worldly and human values and thus become able to bear the awful tenuity and non-figured super-ethereal subtlety of the Real.

Our opportunities for moral striving are not impaired by the discovery of the illusory character of the perceptions of our senses. Morality deals primarily with the gamut of our purposes much more than with the intrinsic value of the objects upon which our activity is bearing. As the mystic emerges from sensory illusions, he becomes more and more conscious of his immersion in the fluctuating undulations of a world of causes, forces and subtle evanescent, changing organisms. Just as his being is so to speak, appended to the operations of that world, other human personalities and even objects, recover a new reality, not in the disguise of their sensory appearances, but in the guise of their intrinsic relation to the causal becoming of which they are the discrete expression.

The first stages of the *Scala Mystica* merely replace the static world of sense experiences by a dynamic evolving world, the Bergsonian *Elan vital*, the "Historical world" of Professor Leroy, the "Process" of Professor Whitehead, in which the personal becoming of the mystic poses new series of moral problems. As long as the personal egotism of the subject endures, he will have to resist temptations to appropriate unduly for his own particular use, some aspects of the general Cosmic *Elan*. This resistance to the self-seeking will to persevere in personal being constitutes the very



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essence of personal morality. It will last as long as it is necessary, as long as the spiritual peak of the soul is still enshrouded in the least traces of the veils constituting the mask of personality.

Thus the purpose and value of the world of our customary experience endures as long as it claims the interest of the mirror of the soul, as long as the mirror is not completely transparent, to use the Sufi expression.

A mystic does not feel limited nor imprisoned in the world of matter. He knows that it is only his own evanescent appearance which seems entangled in the world of appearances. He knows his real identity to be securely at rest in the ocean of infinite peace. Above all, in his loving reverence he accepts gratefully whatever limitations and conditions his Maker is pleased to impose upon him whether it be but for a moment or for eons of time. He feels that this world, in its becoming process, is the expression of a divine purpose from which he must not divorce either his actions or his intentions, even if the purpose should be the obliteration of creation in its return to its origin. Thus the attitude of the mystic towards earthly life is somewhat similar to that of the kindergarten teacher toward the games and plays of her little wards, which although childish, are part of the lofty purpose of the total education of divine souls.

Mysticism also brings its contribution to the problem of the universality of Grace and of the call to Divine Union. All mystics describe, at the "Highest Peak" of the soul, (Paramatma of the Hindus, Atta of Buddhists, The Sirr of Islam, the "Highest Mansion" and the "Spark" of the Christians), the presence of an emergence of the Divine Essence, independently of its recognition by the other regions of the soul. Thus all are endowed with this Divine presence, constituting their intrinsic essence and their only claim to reality.

It might be argued that Grace is not the Divine Presence which, under its operative aspect, is the indispensable condi-

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tion of any manifestation, but the faculty of sensing that presence, which is not imparted to all. The mystics answer that human consciousness is not homogeneous but functions on many planes, conscious or unconscious. The fact that some souls do not seem to be conscious of a Divine presence only applies to their explicit account of the universe. In their behaviour they exhibit evidence of their subconscious perception of a Divine Purpose. The aesthetic sense testifies to the perception of an ideal canon of beauty. The sense of justice so strong in children and even among bandits, at least within their own group, is an evidence of the presence in all hearts of what Professor Royce so aptly terms, man's homing instinct. Thus it seems there is in all souls a tendency to conform to the divine behests, which indicates a measure of perception and response to their presence, although the average trend of consciousness may be engrossed in the general struggle for life of the world of division and personalities.

In the struggle against the lower nature seeking to cling to material values and possessions, the soul needs help from on high to achieve victory. But the experience of mystics is that with diligent dedication to the prescriptions of the spiritual life, all souls can obtain the ordinary graces of orison and enjoy the serene peace resulting from the conquest of worldly attachments. This is even attested by many lay authorities. "The milder forms of mysticism are shared by a very large number of people and are quite possible though latent, for a great many more." (Professor Pratt. *Religious Consciousness*, P. 366.)

Thus the study of various mystic schools strengthens the challenge of mysticism to all thoughtful people. It shows that definitely each one of us has in the secret chamber of his heart a mysterious window which can introduce him to a new and altogether different aspect of life, in a new realm of existence. Its knowledge, far from impoverishing human life enriches it with almost infinite perspectives of immense world-embracing and world-transcending possibilities, while



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it helps to sooth and relieve earthly ills and sufferings. These tend to wane and fade away as the soul progressively conquers its self-esteeming and self-seeking propensity while recognizing increasingly the illusory character of worldly ills. This is the triumphant answer of mysticism to the accusation that it fosters a pessimistic outlook on life. Really it tends to enrich it immeasurably. Its first immediate result is to free the mind from the fetters of an existence restricted by the illusory nature of ordinary perceptions. The intuition of their inadequacy is the main cause of the "Weltschmerz" of the poets, and of the restlessness of modern man.

As long as the soul still remains attached to earth forms, mysticism helps it to perceive behind every finite object, the presence of a whole world of intermediary causes connecting it with Divine Reality ever close to the heart of man as it is to the core of all beings. Thus at the beginning of the mystic way, even worldly life is considerably enriched with values of the highest universal order. As progress is made on the way, there is a gradual transfer of values and vividness from the whirl of the world of objects to its peaceful, serene and majestic essence. As the soul transfers the centre of its interests from the fringe to the centre of life it achieves that reversal of all values so desperately sought by Nietzsche. To say that the soul is thus impoverished is a complete travesty of facts. It is true that the number of its pre-occupations has been reduced considerably, and that it is no longer concerned with many things which keep most men in a constant rush of anxieties, desires and passing, superficial thrills. They are no longer moved by events which seem of tremendous import to childish minds. But they have felt the growth in their hearts of new pillars of steadfastness, providing an unshakable foundation for their Faith which has now become a secure knowledge of the Divine Reality, for their Hope, which is all the stronger and more inspiring for having been partly achieved, and for their Love which is quickened by the perception of the Divine presence in all



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beings, as well as of the participation of all beings in the Divine Presence in one's own heart.

In that sense, mysticism tends to lessen the severity of the moral struggle, but only because the battle has been intensified and partly won through the disciplinary exercises of the catharsis. Mysticism tends to create new men, and in the measure that the solutions of the different world and social crises depend on a change of heart of the present generation, mysticism, in the diffusion of its milder forms, seems called to play an important part in the establishment of a better and more harmonious world-order.

In particular, it seems called upon to provide the new ardour necessary to the re-animation of religion as a living, and creative factor in the social life. Of course, nothing could be farther from the spirit of mysticism than to recommend its practice so that the churches may have greater power in the shaping of worldly things on a pattern more satisfactory for human eyes. After all, if this life has for its purpose the creation of moral and spiritual values, it is quite possible that a world of strife and hazards is better adapted to their promotion than the sweet, orderly and somewhat soporific world envisioned by nice elderly spinsters. But if the hazards of worldly strife are not very frightful for the mystic who sees in them mere undulations on the fringe of the changing cloak of Reality, he is greatly anxious to contribute to the establishment of harmony on the higher levels of human participation in the universal life, nearer the core of Reality. In this respect one of the most acute signs of the necessity of a radical change in orientation is provided by the difficulties experienced by organized religious bodies to bridge over their controversies and differences, in order to resume the position of leadership in the vanguard of humanity in its surge onward and upward. Nowadays, instead of leading, the churches can run the risk of being outdistanced by independent thinkers.

The growing impatience of progressive thinkers with the sectarianism and factionalism of form-bound religion

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has been excellently summed up by Professor Hocking: "If there is to be a world culture and if there is to be any such thing as religion in the new order there must be a world faith . . . God is in His world, but Buddha, Jesus, Mohamed, are in their little private closets" and he adds further, "Buddhism, Christianity, Islam are all reforms, all tend to universality, yet, all have tended to revert to localization in centering on the cult of their founder" (Liv. Relig. and a World Faith.) In a paradox often met in problems astride the two worlds of sensory perceptions and of intuitive realizations, mysticism at the same time completely endorses this desire to see the establishment of a world-religion above confessional sectionalism and personal limitations, and also renders it unnecessary.

Comparative mysticism may be said at the same time to be the complement of the comparative study of religion and its antidote. The comparative study of the growth of dogmas, showing them to emerge from their forerunners and to be formed with borrowings from many kindred social forms, discloses them to be products of historical evolution, with very little transcendent value. Hence a justified impatience towards attitudes which lay so much stress on dogmas that it is allowed to block the way to the necessary inter-denominational collaboration in the rescue of moral and spiritual values.

On the other hand comparative mysticism, while also tending to minimize the practical value of intellectual dogmatism for the active fulfilment of the function of religion, considers this last to be primarily, not the establishment of more desirable conditions in this world but the production of spiritual values in the souls of the faithful. To them, the advent of the Kingdom does not mean the establishment of a world order in which all assiduously respect traffic lights on all levels of human expression, but the complete transmutation of all human strivings into spiritual dedications constituting as many open accesses to the ingress of

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Grace from on high. In that sense, the many different churches, however differing they may be in their professions of Faith, in the measure in which they stimulate spiritual dedication and love of the Lord in their disciples, are already actively collaborating in the united front of spiritual agencies in our world. While their dogmatic ritualistic contentions are seen to be nurtured by intellectual illusions, and are of no consequence from the spiritual standpoint, they are intrinsically united in the measure of the spiritual awakening of their faithful. As a consequence, while comparative mysticism provides little incentive to literal and dogmatic proselytism, it is a great stimulant to the activation of that which constitutes the live and vigorous aspect of all churches. It also provides a remedy for the tendency of some restless people to become impatient with the short-comings they discover in their own organized religious bodies. It tends to bring the religionist to envision his contribution to the progress of his church not in terms of a change of rules or outer activities, but of an intensification of his own inner opening to the flow of grace, in humility and a realization that religious forms owe their value to their permeability to the influx of creative life or grace, and that this depends almost exclusively on the inner attitude of their members. This is the lesson of the parable of Martha and Mary and is perhaps the chief practical message of mysticism.

Of course, we have been barely able to scour over some of the outstanding aspects of our subject in this series of lectures and it is tantalizing to realize how much of importance has had to be ignored in our rapid survey. But we hope to have been enabled to confirm, and perhaps render more vivid, the awareness of the immense realm of cosmic possibilities of which our daily world is but a puny aspect, and which adds more scope to our vision, more assurance to our faith, more expectations to our hope and more warmth to our love of the immediate and all embracing Divine Reality.



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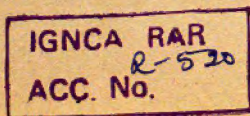
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